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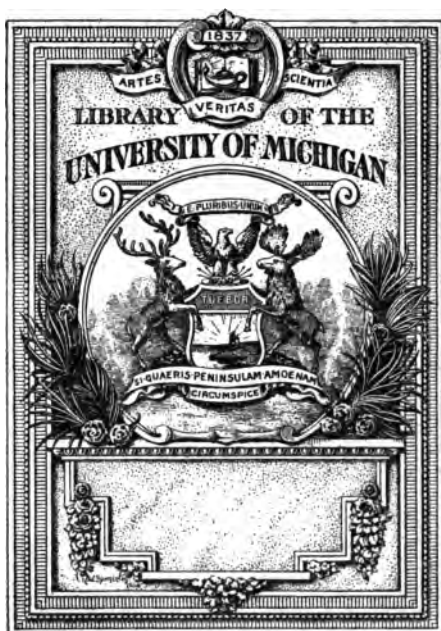
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170-1821

SHAKSPEARE AND HIS TIMES.

Shakespeare, Pict. & Stat.

BY M. GUIZOT.

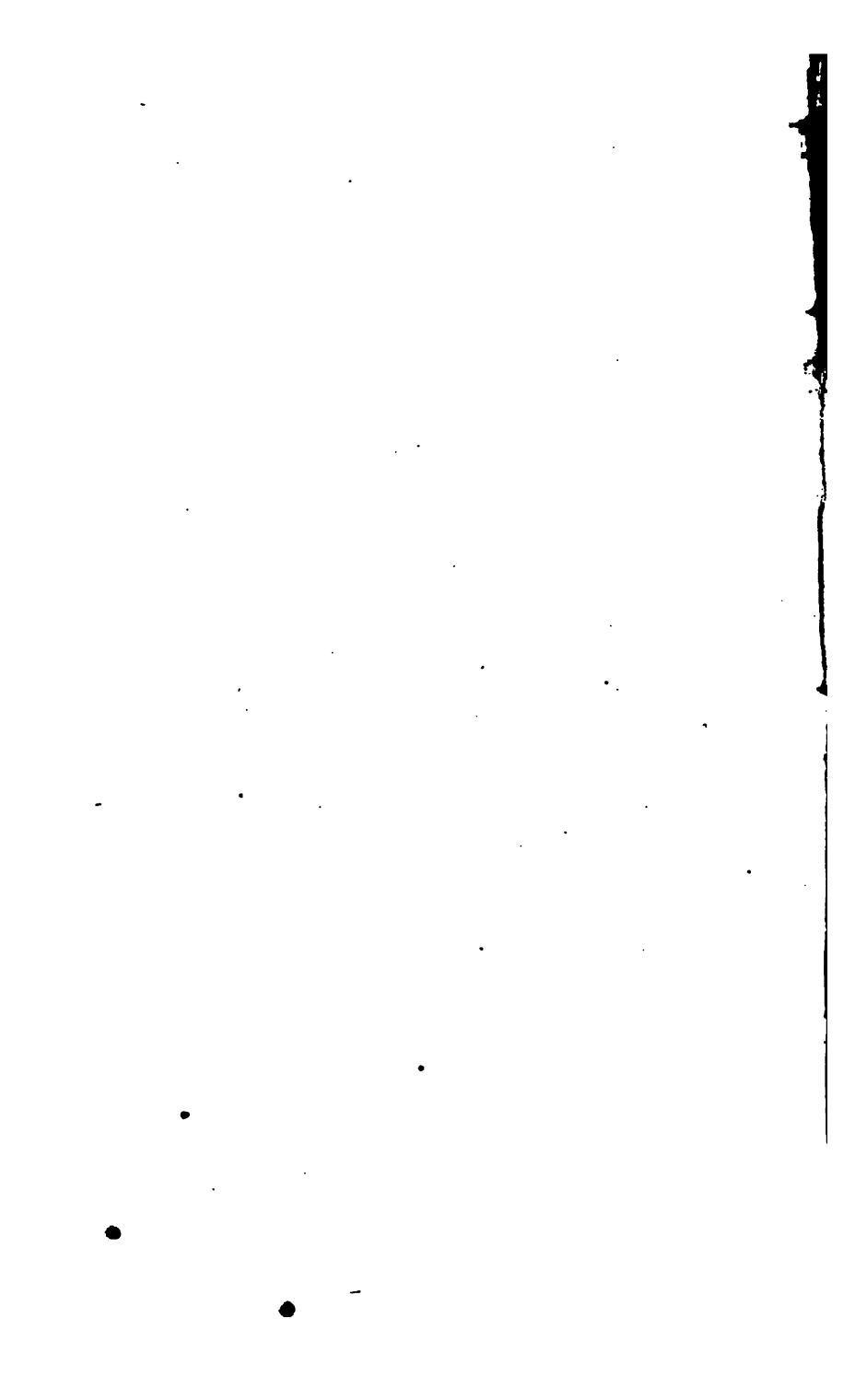
NEW-YORK:

HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS,

329 & 331 PEARL STREET,

FRANKLIN SQUARE,

1855.



P R E F A C E.

THE Essay on the Life and Works of Shakspeare, which I reprint in the present volume, appeared for the first time as an Introduction to the French edition of Shakspeare's complete works, which was published at Paris in 1821. This edition was based upon the translation of Shakspeare's plays which was commenced in 1776 by Le Tourneur, and which, at that period, gave rise to such animated disputes in the literary world, and especially in the Correspondence of Voltaire and of La Harpe. In 1821 I undertook to edit this translation of Shakspeare's principal works, and I revised six tragedies, ten historical dramas, and three comedies. M. De Barante kindly assisted me by translating "Hamlet;" and M. Amédée Pichot, who is so thoroughly acquainted with England and English literature, undertook to revise all the remaining plays.

Since that period other translations of Shakspeare, both partial and complete, in prose and in verse, have been published. Whatever their merit may be, they have not been successful; and no one will ever succeed, except imperfectly, in transfusing into our language, with their true character and full effect, the works of this prodigious genius. This arises not only from the fact that every translation must necessarily be imperfect and insufficient, but also on account of the particular turn of Shakspeare's mind and style, as well as that of his national tongue. Shakspeare is excellent in substance, but deficient in form; he

discerns, and brings admirably into view, the instincts, passions, ideas—indeed, all the inner life of man; he is the most profound and most dramatic of moralists; but he makes his personages speak a language which is often fastidious, strange, excessive, and destitute of moderation and naturalness. And the English language is singularly propitious to the defects, as well as to the beauties, of Shakspeare; it is rich, energetic, passionate, abundant, striking; it readily admits the lofty flights, and even the wild excesses, of the poetic imagination; but it does not possess that elegant sobriety, that severe and delicate precision, that moderation in expression and harmony in imagery, which constitute the peculiar merit of the French language; so that, when Shakspeare passes from England into France, if he is translated with scrupulous fidelity, his defects become more apparent, and more offensive, beneath his new dress, than they were in his native form; and if, on the other hand, it is attempted to adapt his language, even in the slightest degree, to the genius of our tongue, he is inevitably robbed of a great part of his wealth, force, and originality. A literal translation and a free rendering do wrong to Shakspeare in a different manner, but in an equal degree. When he is translated, or when he is read in a translation, it must never be forgotten that he labors under one or other of these disadvantages.

In continuation of the *Essay on the Life and Works of Shakspeare*, I have published, in this volume, a series of *Notices of his principal dramas*, and an *Essay on Othello and Dramatic Art in France in 1830*, which the Duke De Broglie inserted, at that period, in the "*Revue Francaise*," and which he has kindly allowed me to include in this volume. These *Essays* constitute, in some sort, proofs in support of the ideas which, in 1821, I endeavored to de-

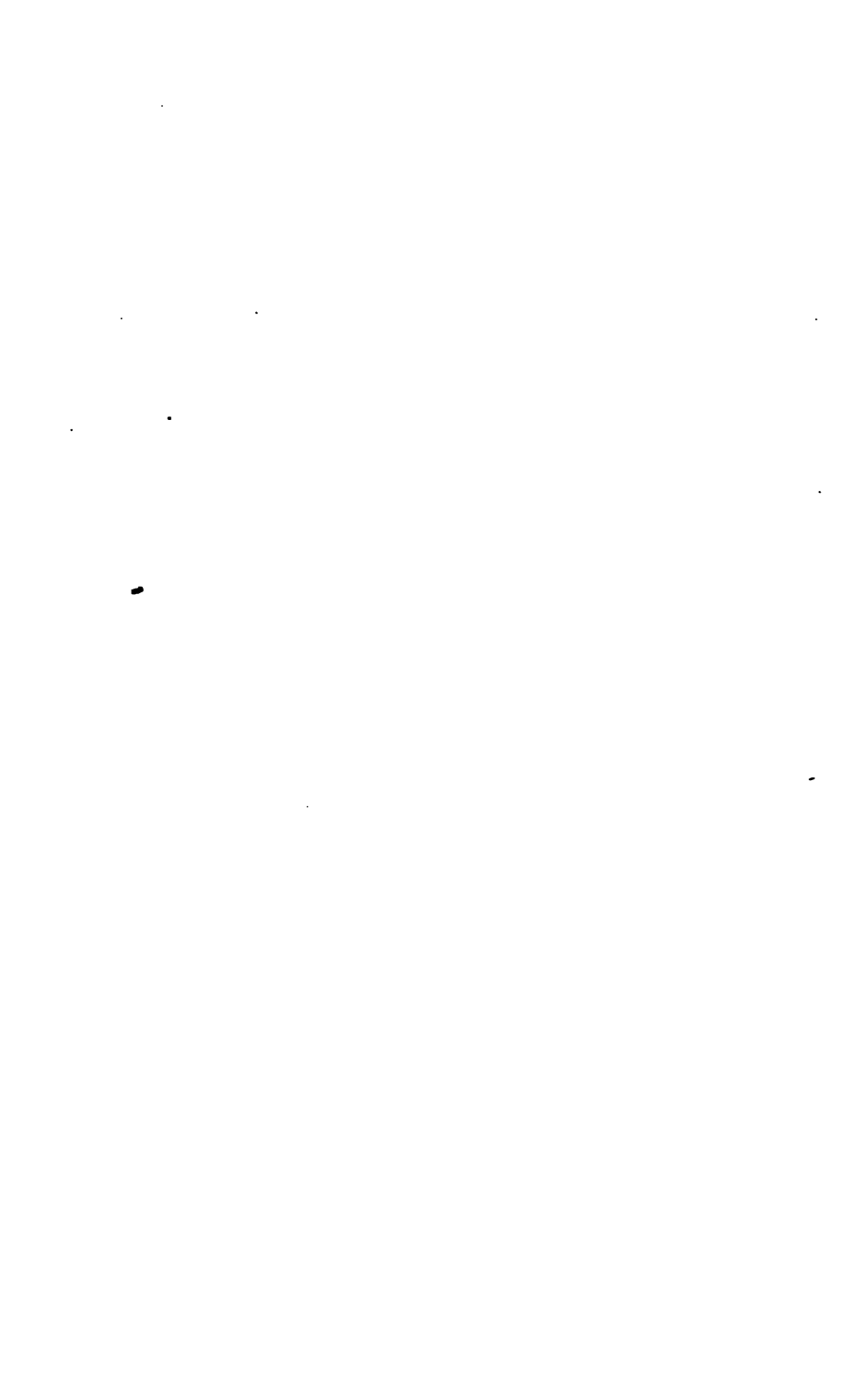
PREFACE.

v

velop regarding the nature of dramatic art in general, and the particular and diversified forms which it has assumed among those nations and in those ages in which it has shone with greatest brilliancy: an art so powerful and attractive, that, in all times and at all places, in the period of its infancy as well as in that of its maturity—of its glory as well as of its decline—it has ever remained invincibly popular, and has never ceased to charm all men either by its master-pieces or by its sparkling *bluettes*.

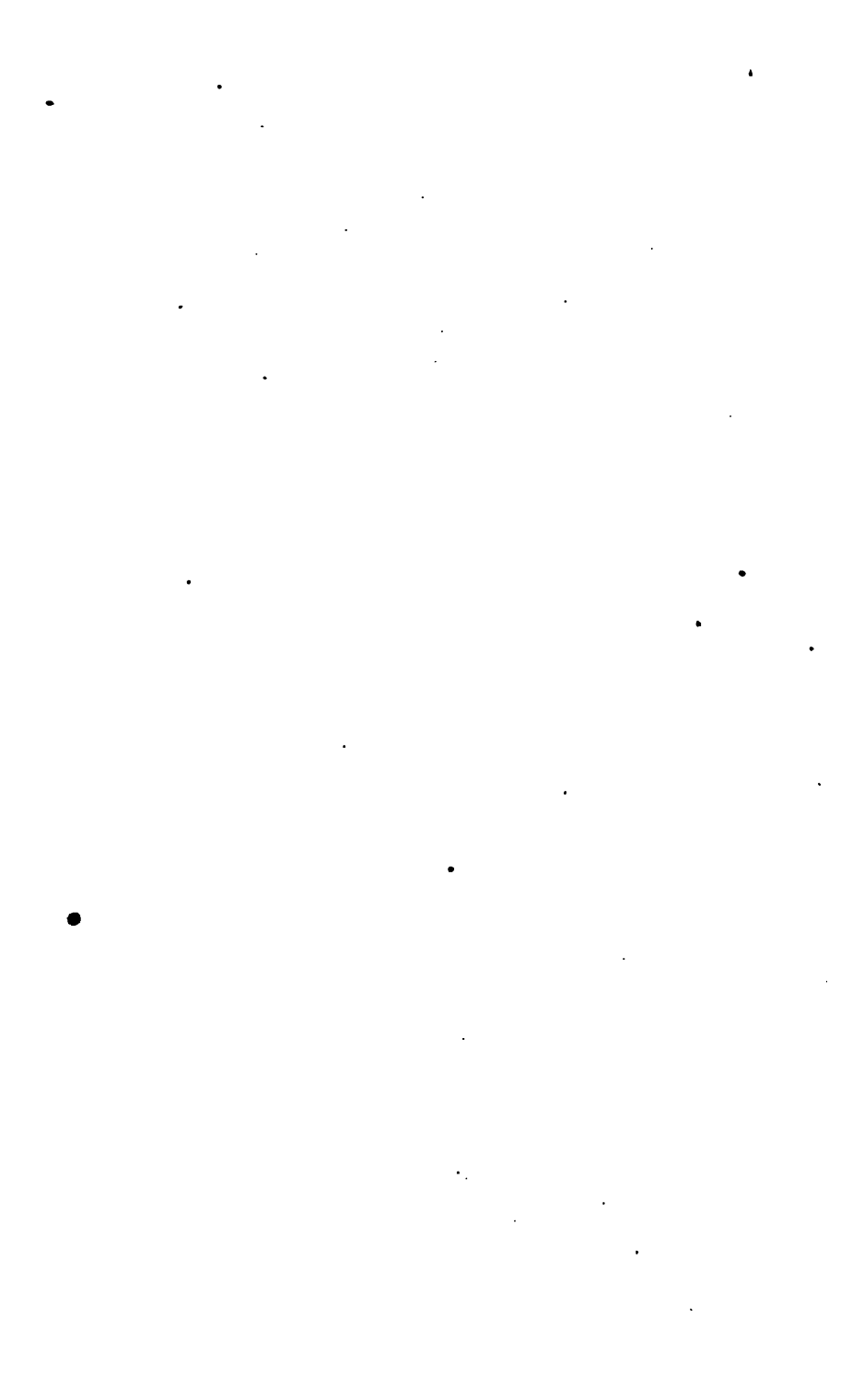
Guizot.

PARIS, June 10, 1852.



CONTENTS.

	Page
SHAKSPEARE AND HIS TIMES	9
 SHAKSPEARE'S TRAGEDIES:	
ROMEO AND JULIET	161
HAMLET	174
KING LEAR	185
MACBETH	192
JULIUS CÆSAR	208
OTHELLO	216
 SHAKSPEARE IN FRANCE	 228
 SHAKSPEARE'S HISTORICAL DRAMAS.....	 295
KING JOHN	297
KING RICHARD II.	304
KING HENRY IV.	312
KING HENRY V.	320
KING HENRY VI.	322
KING RICHARD III.	334
KING HENRY VIII.	340
 SHAKSPEARE'S COMEDIES:	
THE MERCHANT OF VENICE	343
THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR	348
THE TEMPEST	354



SHAKSPEARE AND HIS TIMES.

VOLTAIRE was the first person in France who spoke of Shakspeare's genius; and although he spoke of him merely as a barbarian genius, the French public were of opinion that Voltaire had said too much in his favor. Indeed, they thought it nothing less than profanation to apply the words genius and glory to dramas which they considered as crude as they were coarse.

At the present day, all controversy regarding Shakspeare's genius and glory has come to an end. No one ventures any longer to dispute them; but a greater question has arisen, namely, whether Shakspeare's dramatic system is not far superior to that of Voltaire.

This question I do not presume to decide. I merely say that it is now open for discussion. We have been led to it by the onward progress of ideas. I shall endeavor to point out the causes which have brought it about; but at present I insist merely upon the fact itself, and deduce from it one simple consequence, that literary criticism has changed its ground, and can no longer remain restricted to the limits within which it was formerly confined.

Literature does not escape from the revolutions of the human mind; it is compelled to follow it in its course—to transport itself beneath the horizon under which it is conveyed; to gain elevation and extension with the ideas

which occupy its notice, and to consider the questions which it discusses under the new aspects and novel circumstances in which they are placed by the new state of thought and of society.

My readers will not, therefore, be surprised that, in order properly to appreciate Shakspeare, I find it necessary to make some preliminary researches into the nature of dramatic poetry and the civilization of modern peoples, especially of England. If we did not begin with these general considerations, it would be impossible to keep pace with the confused, perhaps, but active and urgent ideas, which such a subject originates in all minds.

A theatrical performance is a popular festival; that it should be so is required by the very nature of dramatic poetry. Its power rests upon the effects of sympathy—of that mysterious force which causes laughter to beget laughter; which bids tears to flow at the sight of tears, and which, in spite of the diversity of dispositions, conditions, and characters, produces the same impression on all upon whom it simultaneously acts. For the proper development of these effects, a crowd must be assembled; those ideas and feelings which would pass languidly from one man to another, traverse the serried ranks of a multitude with the rapidity of lightning; and it is only when large masses of men are collected together that we observe the action of that moral electricity which the dramatic poet calls into such powerful operation.

Dramatic poetry, therefore, could originate only among the people. At its birth it was destined to promote their pleasures; in their festivities it once performed an active part; and with the first songs of Thespis the chorus of the spectators invariably united.

But the people are not slow to perceive that the pleas-

ures with which they can supply themselves are neither the best, nor the only pleasures which they are capable of enjoying. To those classes which spend their days in toil, complete repose seems to be the first and almost the sole condition of pleasure. A momentary suspension of the efforts or privations of daily life, an interval of movement and liberty, a relative abundance; this is all that the people seek to derive from those festivities which they are able to provide for themselves—these are all the enjoyments which it is in their power to procure. And yet these men are born to experience nobler and keener delights; they are possessed of faculties which the monotony of their existence has allowed to lie dormant in inactivity. If these faculties be awakened by a powerful voice; if an animated narrative, or a stirring scene stimulate these drowsy imaginations, these torpid sensibilities, they will gain an activity which they could never have imparted to themselves, but which they will rejoice to receive; and then will arise, without the co-operation of the multitude, but in its presence and for its amusement, new games and new pleasures which will speedily become necessities.

To such festivities as these the dramatic poet invites the assembled people. He undertakes to divert them, but the amusement which he supplies is one of which they would have been ignorant without his assistance. *Æschylus* relates to his fellow-citizens the victories of *Salamis*, the anxieties of *Atossa*, and the grief of *Xerxes*. He charms the people of *Athens*, but it is by raising them to a level with emotions and ideas which *Æschylus* alone could exalt to so high a point; and he communicates to the multitude impressions which they are capable of feeling, but which *Æschylus* alone is able to awaken. Such is the nature of dramatic poetry; for the people it calls its

creations into being, to the people it addresses itself; but it is in order to ennoble their character, to extend and vivify their moral existence, to reveal to them faculties which they unconsciously possess, and to procure for them enjoyments which they eagerly seize, but which they would not even seek after, if a sublime art did not reveal to them their existence by making them minister to their gratification.

And this work the dramatic poet must necessarily pursue; he must elevate and civilize, as it were, the crowd that he summons to hear his performance. How can he act upon the assembled multitude, except by an appeal to the most general and elevated characteristics of their nature? It is only by going out of the narrow circle of common life and individual interests that the imagination becomes exalted and the heart enlarged, that pleasures become disinterested and the affections generous, and that men can sympathize in those common emotions the expression of which causes the theatre to resound with transports of delight. Religion has, therefore, universally been the source and furnished the primitive materials of dramatic art; at its origin, it celebrated, among the Greeks, the adventures of Bacchus, and, in Northern Europe, the mysteries of Christ. (This arises from the fact that, of all human affections, piety most powerfully unites men in common feelings, because it most thoroughly detaches them from themselves;) it is also less dependent for its development upon the progress of civilization, as it is powerful and pure even in the most backward state of society. From its very beginning, dramatic poetry has invoked the aid of piety, because, of all the sentiments to which it could address itself, piety was the noblest and the most universal.

Originating thus among the people and for the people, but destined to elevate them by affording them delight, the dramatic art speedily became, in every age and country, and by reason of this very characteristic of its nature, the favorite pleasure of the superior classes.

This was its natural tendency ; and in this, also, it has encountered its most dangerous quicksands. More than once, allowing itself to be led astray by its high fortune, dramatic art has lost or compromised its energy and liberty. When the superior classes can fully give themselves up to their position, they fall into the error or misfortune of isolating themselves from their fellows, and ceasing, as it were, to share in the general nature of man, and the public interests of society. Those universal feelings, natural ideas, and simple relationships which constitute the basis of humanity and of life, become changed and enervated in a social condition which consists entirely of exceptions and privileges. In such a state of society, conventionalisms take the place of realities, and morals become factitious and feeble. Human destiny ceases to be known under its most salient and general aspects. It has a thousand phases, it leads to a host of impressions and relations of which the higher classes are utterly ignorant, unless they are compelled to enter frequently into the public atmosphere. Dramatic art, when devoted to their pleasure, finds its domain greatly diminished and impoverished ; it is invaded by a sort of monotony ; events, passions, characters, all those natural treasures which it lays under contribution, no longer supply it with the same originality and wealth. Its independence is imperiled as well as its variety and energy. The habits of elegant society, as well as those of the multitude, are characterized by their littlenesses, and it is much more capable of im-

posing these littlenesses as laws. It is stimulated by tastes rather than by necessities; it rarely introduces into its pleasures that serious and ingenuous disposition which abandons itself with transport to the impressions which it receives; and it very frequently treats genius as a servant who is bound to please it, and not as a power that is capable of governing it by the enjoyments which it can supply. If the dramatic poet does not possess, in the suffrages of a larger and more simple public, the means of defending himself against the haughty taste of a select coterie—if he can not arm himself with public approbation, and rely for support upon the universal feelings which he has been able to arouse in all hearts—his liberty is lost; the caprices which he has attempted to satisfy will weigh upon him like a chain, from which he will be unable to free himself; talent, which is entitled to command all, will find itself subject to the minority, and he who ought to guide the taste of the people, will become the slave of fashion.

Such, then, is the nature of dramatic poetry that, in order to produce its most magical effects, and to preserve, during its growth, its liberty as well as its wealth, it must not separate from the people, to whom its earliest efforts were addressed. It languishes, if it is transplanted from the soil in which it first took root. Popular at its origin, it must continue to be national, and it must not cease to comprehend beneath its sway, and to charm with its productions, all classes that are capable of experiencing the emotions from which it derives its power.

All ages of society, and all states of civilization are not equally favorable to calling the people to the aid of dramatic poetry, and insuring its prosperity under their influence. It was the happy lot of Greece that the whole na-

tion grew and developed itself together with literature and the arts, keeping always on a level with their progress, and acting as a competent judge of their glory. That same people of Athens, who had surrounded the chariot of Thespis, thronged to hear the master-pieces of Sophocles and Euripides; and the most splendid triumphs of genius were always, in that city, popular festivals. So brilliant a moral equality has not presided over the destiny of modern nations; their civilization, displaying itself upon a far more extended scale, has undergone many more vicissitudes, and presented much less unity. During more than ten centuries, nothing was easy, general, or simple in our Europe. Religion, liberty, public order, literature—nothing has been developed among us without long-continued effort, in the midst of incessantly-renewed struggles, and under the most diversified influences. Amid this mighty and agitated chaos, dramatic poetry did not possess the privilege of an easy and rapid career. It was not its fate to find, almost at its birth, a public at once homogeneous and various, the constituent members of which, both great and small, rich and poor, in fine, all classes of citizens, should be equally eager for, and worthy of its most brilliant solemnities. Neither epochs of great social disorder nor periods of severe necessity are times in which the masses can devote themselves with enthusiasm to the pleasures of the stage. Literature prospers only when it is so intimately united with the tastes, habits, and entire existence of a people as to be regarded at once as an occupation and a festivity, an amusement and a necessity. Dramatic poetry, more than any other branch of literature, depends upon this deep-seated and general union of the arts with society. It is not satisfied with the tranquil pleasures of enlightened approbation, but it requires the

quick impulses of passion ; it does not seek men in leisure and retirement that it may furnish agreeable occupation for their hours of repose, but it requires men to hasten and throng around it. A certain degree of mental development and simplicity; a certain community of ideas and habits between the different classes of society, greater ardor than fixity of imagination, greater movement of soul than of existence, a strongly-excited moral activity destitute of any imperious and determined object, liberty of thought and repose of life—these are the circumstances of which dramatic poetry has need, in order to shine with its full splendor. These circumstances never combined so completely or so harmoniously among modern peoples as among the Greeks. But wherever their leading characteristics have been found to exist, the drama has become elevated ; and neither have men of genius been failing to the public, nor has the public proved wanting to men of genius.

| The reign of Elizabeth, in England, was one of those decisive epochs, so laboriously attained by modern peoples which terminate the empire of force and inaugurate the reign of ideas. Original and fruitful epochs are these, when the nations flock to mental enjoyments as to a new kind of gratification, and when thought prepares, in the pleasures of youth, for the discharge of those functions which it will be called upon to exercise at a riper age.

Scarcely recovered from the storms with which it had been ravaged by the alternate successes and reverses of the Red and White Roses, before it was again distracted and exhausted by the capricious tyranny of Henry VIII. and the malevolent despotism of Mary, England demanded of Elizabeth, at her accession, nothing but order and peace ; and this was precisely what Elizabeth was most dis-

posed to bestow. Naturally prudent and reserved, though haughty and strong-willed, she had been taught by the stern necessities of her youth never to compromise herself. When upon the throne, she maintained her independence by asking little of her people, and staked her policy upon running no risks. Military glory could not seduce a distrustful woman. The sovereignty of the Netherlands, notwithstanding the efforts of the Dutch to induce her to accept it, did not tempt her wary ambition. She resignedly determined to make no attempt to recover Calais, or to retain Havre; and all her desires of greatness, as well as all the cares of her government, were concentrated upon the direct interests of the country which she had to restore to repose and prosperity.

Surprised at so novel a state of things, the people revelled in it with the intoxication of returning health. Civilization, which had been destroyed or suspended by their dissensions, revived or progressed on every side. Industry brought wealth in its train, and notwithstanding the shackles imposed by the oppressive proceedings of the government, all the historians and all the documents of this period bear testimony to the rapid progress of popular luxury. The chronicler Harrison informs us that he had heard many old men express their surprise at "the multitude of chimneys lately erected, whereas in their young days there were not above two or three, if so many, in most uplandish towns of the realm (the religious houses and manor-places of their lords always excepted). 'Our fathers,' they said, 'lay full oft upon straw pallets, on rough mats covered only with a sheet, and a good round log under their heads instead of a bolster or pillow; and if the good man of the house had, within seven years after his marriage, purchased a mattress or stock-bed,

and thereto a sack of chaff to rest his head upon, he thought himself to be as well lodged as the lord of the town.'"* But Elizabeth ascended the throne, and Shakspeare tells us that the busiest employment of the elves and fairies was to pinch "black and blue" those servants who neglected to cleanse the hearth-stone with due regularity. And Harrison informs us that the farmers' houses in his time were well supplied "with three or four featherbeds, as many coverlids and carpets of tapestry, besides a fair garnish of pewter on the cupboard, with a silver salt-cellar, a bowl for wine, and a dozen of spoons to furnish up the suit."†

More than one generation will pass away before a people will have exhausted the novel enjoyments of such unusual good fortune. The reigns of both Elizabeth and her successor were scarcely sufficient to wear out that taste for comfort and repose which had been fostered by long-continued agitations; and that religious ardor, the explosion of which subsequently revealed the existence of new forces which had lain hid in the bosom of society during the tranquillity of these two reigns, was then spreading itself silently among the masses, without as yet giving birth to any general and decisive movement.

The Reformation, though treated with hostility by the great sovereigns of the Continent, had received from Henry VIII. enough encouragement and support to lessen its ambition and retard its progress for a time. The yoke of Rome had been cast off, and monastic life abolished. By thus granting satisfaction to the primary desires of the age, and turning the first blows of the Reformation to the advantage of material interests, Henry VIII. deterred

* Harrison's Description of England, prefixed to Holinshed's Chronicles, vol. i., p. 188.

† Ibid., p. 189.

many minds from inquiring more thoroughly into the purely theological dogmas of Catholicism, which no longer shocked them by the exhibition of its most obnoxious abuses. Faith, it is true, was in a tottering state, and could no longer cling firmly to disputed doctrines. These doctrines, therefore, were fated one day to fall; but the day of their rejection was delayed. At a time when the Catholic defender of the real presence was burned at the stake for maintaining the supremacy of the Pope, and the Reformer who denied the papal supremacy suffered the same punishment for refusing to admit the real presence, many minds necessarily remained in suspense. Neither of the two conflicting opinions afforded to cowardice, which is so plentifully manifested in difficult times, the refuge of a victorious party. The dogma of political obedience was the only one which docile consciences could adopt with any zeal; and among the sincere adherents of either party, the hopes of triumph which so singular a position allowed each to entertain still kept in activity those timidly courageous individuals whom tyranny is obliged to pursue into their last retrenchments, in order to force them to offer any resistance.

The vicissitudes experienced by the religious establishment of England, during the reigns of Edward VI. and Mary, tended to maintain this disposition. Anxiety for martyrdom had not time, in either party, to nourish and diffuse itself; and though the party of the Reformation—which was already more influential over the public mind, more persevering in its exertions, and more remarkable for the number and courage of its martyrs—was proceeding evidently toward a final victory, yet the success which it had obtained at the accession of Elizabeth had supplied it rather with leisure to prepare for new conflicts than

with power to engage in them at once, and to render them decisive.

Though connected, by her position, with the doctrines of the Reformers, Elizabeth had, in common with the Catholic clergy, a strong taste for pomp and authority. Her first regulations in regard to religious matters were, consequently, of such a character that most of the Catholics felt no repugnance to attend the divine worship with which the Reformers were satisfied; and the establishment of the Anglican Church, which was intrusted to the hands of the existing clergy, met with very little resistance, and at the same time very little encouragement, from the general body of ecclesiastics. Religion continued to be regarded, by a great many persons, as a merely political matter. The disputes of England with the Court of Rome and with Spain, a few internal conspiracies and the severities with which they were repressed, successively created new causes for animosity between the two parties. Religious interest, however, had so little influence over public feeling, that in 1569, Elizabeth, the daughter of the Reformation, but far more precious to her people as the pledge of public repose and prosperity, found most of her Catholic subjects zealous to assist her to crush the Catholic rebellion of a part of the north of England.

For still stronger reasons, they willingly agreed to that joyous forgetfulness of all great subjects of dispute which Elizabeth encouraged them to entertain. It is true that, in the depths of the masses of the people, the Reformation, which had been flattered, but not satisfied, murmured in distinctly; and even that voice which was destined soon to shake all England to its centre was heard gradually rising to utterance. But amid that movement of youth-

ful vigor, which had, as it were, carried away the whole nation, the stern severity of the Reformers was still regarded as importunate, and those who had bestowed on it a passing glance quickly turned their eyes in some more agreeable direction; so that the accents of Puritanism, united with those of liberty, were repressed without effort by a power under whose protection the people had too recently been sheltered to entertain any great fear of its encroachments.

No periods are perhaps more favorable to the fertility and originality of mental productions than those times at which a nation already free, but still ignorant of its own position, ingenuously enjoys what it possesses without perceiving in what it is deficient: times full of ardor, but very easy to please, before rights have been narrowly defined, powers discussed, or restrictions agreed upon. The government and the public, proceeding in their course undisturbed by fears or scruples, exist together without any distrustful observance of each other, and even come into communication but rarely. If, on the one side, power is unlimited, on the other liberty will be great; for both parties will be ignorant of those general forms, those innumerable and minute duties to which actions and minds are more or less subjected by a scientifically constructed despotism, and even by a well-regulated liberty. Thus it was that the age of Richelieu and Louis XIV. consciously possessed that amount of liberty which has furnished us with a literature and a drama. At that period of our history, when even the name of public liberties seemed to have been forgotten, and when a feeling of the dignity of man served as the basis neither of the institutions of the country nor of the acts of the government, the dignity of individual positions still existed wherever power had not

yet found it necessary to crush it. Beside the forms of servility, we meet with forms, and sometimes even with manifestations of independence. The grand seigneur, though submissive and adoring as a courtier, could nevertheless proudly remember on certain occasions that he was a gentleman. Corneille the citizen could find no terms sufficiently humble to express his gratitude to, and dependence upon, Cardinal Richelieu; but Corneille the poet disdained the authority which assumed to prescribe rules for the guidance of his genius, and defended, against the literary pretensions of an absolute minister, those "secret means of pleasing" which he might have found in his art." In fine, men of vigorous mind evaded in a thousand ways the yoke of a still incomplete or inexperienced despotism; and the imagination soared freely in every direction within the range of its flight.

In England, during the reign of Elizabeth, the supreme power, though far more irregular and less skillfully organised than it was in France under Louis XIV., had to treat with much more deeply-rooted principles of liberty. It would be a mistake to measure the despotism of Elizabeth by the speeches of her flatterers, or even by the acts of her government. In her still young and inexperienced court, the language of adulation far exceeded the servility of the adulator; and in the country, in which ancient institutions had by no means perished, the government was far from exercising universal sway. In the counties and chief towns, an independent administration maintained habits and instincts of liberty. The queen imposed silence upon the Commons when they pressed her to appoint a successor, or to grant some article of religious liberty. But the Commons had met, and spoken; and the queen, notwithstanding the haughtiness of her refusal,

took great care to give no cause for complaints that might have increased the authority of their words. Despotism and liberty, thus avoiding a meeting instead of seeking a battle, manifested themselves without feeling any hatred for each other, with that simplicity of action which prevents those collisions and banishes those bitter feelings which are occasioned on both sides by continual resistance. A Puritan had had his right hand cut off as a punishment for having written a tract against the proposed marriage of Elizabeth to the Duke of Anjou; and immediately after the sentence had been executed, he waved his hat with his left hand, and shouted, "God save the Queen!" When loyalty is thus deeply rooted in the heart of a man exposed to such sufferings for the cause of liberty, liberty in general must necessarily think that it has no great reason for complaint.

This period, then, was deficient in none of the advantages which it was capable of desiring. There was nothing to prevent the minds of the people from indulging freely in all the intoxication natural to thought when it has reached the age of development—an age of follies and miracles, when the imagination revels in its most puerile as well as in its noblest manifestations. Extravagantly luxurious festivities, splendor of dress, addiction to gallantry, ardent conformity to fashion, and sacrifices to favor, employed the wealth and leisure of the courtiers of Elizabeth. More enthusiastic temperaments went to distant lands in search of adventures, which, in addition to the hope of fortune, offered them the livelier pleasure of perilous encounters. Sir Francis Drake sailed forth as a corsair, and volunteers thronged on board his ship; Sir Walter Raleigh announced a distant expedition, and scions of noble houses sold their goods to join his crew. Spontane-

ous ventures and patriotic enterprises followed each other in almost daily succession ; and, far from becoming exhausted by this continual movement, the minds of men received from it fresh vigor and impulse. Thought claimed its share in the supply of pleasures, and became, at the same time, the sustenance of the most serious passions. While the crowd hurried on all sides into the numerous theatres which had been erected, the Puritan, in his solitary meditations, burned with indignation against these pomps of Belial, and this sacrilegious employment of man, the image of God upon earth. Poetic ardor and religious asperity, literary quarrels and theological controversies, taste for festivities and fanaticism for austerities, philosophy and criticism, sermons, pamphlets, and epigrams, appeared simultaneously, and jostled each other in admired confusion. Amid this natural and fantastic conflict of opposite elements, the power of opinion, the feeling and habit of liberty, were silently in process of formation : two forces, brilliant at their first appearance and imposing in their progress, the first-fruits of which belong to any skillful government that is able to use them, but the maturity of which is terrible to any imprudent government that may attempt to reduce them to servitude. The impulse which has constituted the glory of a reign, may speedily become the fever which will precipitate a people into revolution. In the days of Elizabeth, the movement of the public mind summoned England only to festivities ; and dramatic poetry sprang into full being under the master-hand of Shakspeare.

Who would not delight to go to the fountain-head of the first inspirations of an original genius ; to penetrate into the secret of the causes which guided his nascent powers ; to follow him step by step in his progress ; and,

in a word, to behold the whole inner life of a man who, after having in his own country opened to dramatic poetry the road which she has never since quitted, still reigns pre-eminent, and with almost undivided sway? Unfortunately, Shakspeare is one of those superior men whose life was but little noticed by his contemporaries, and it has therefore remained obscure to succeeding generations. A few civil registers in which traces of the existence of his family have been preserved, a few traditions connected with his name in the district in which he was born, and the splendid productions of his own genius, are the only means which we possess of supplying the deficiencies of his personal history.

The family of Shakspeare resided at Stratford-upon-Avon, in the county of Warwick. His father, John Shakspeare, derived the greater part of his income, as it would appear, from his business as a wool-stapler. It is probable, however, that he connected with this several other branches of trade; for in some anecdotes collected at Stratford—fifty years, it is true, after Shakspeare's death—Aubrey* represents him to have been the son of a butcher. At such a distance of time, recollections handed down through two or three generations might have become somewhat confused in the memory of Shakspeare's fellow-townsmen; but professions were not then so distinct or so numerous as they have become in our times, and nothing could have been less strange, at this period, and especially in a small town, than the union of the various trades connected with the sale of cattle. However this may be, Shakspeare's family belonged to that

* A writer who lived about fifty years after Shakspeare, and who made a collection of anecdotes and traditions regarding the time in which he flourished.

bourgeoisie which early acquired so much importance in England. His great-great-grandfather had received from Henry VII., "for his valiant and faithful services," a grant of land in Warwickshire. His father filled the office of high bailiff of Stratford in the year 1569; but, ten years afterward, it would seem that he experienced a reverse of fortune, for in 1579 we find, from the registers of Stratford, that two aldermen, of whom John Shakspeare was one, were exempted from paying a small tax paid by their colleagues. In 1586 he was removed from his office of alderman, the duties of which he had for some time ceased to perform. Other causes besides his poverty may have led to his removal. It has been said that Shakspeare was a Catholic; and it appears at least to be certain that such was the faith of his father. In the year 1770, a bricklayer, while mending the roof of the house in which Shakspeare was born, found, between the rafters and the tiling, a manuscript, which had doubtless been hidden there in a time of persecution, and which contained a profession of the Catholic faith in fourteen articles, all of which began with the words: "I, John Shakspeare." The ever-increasing power of the doctrines of the Reformation had, perhaps, rendered the duties of an alderman more difficult of performance to a Catholic, who, as he advanced in age, may also have become more scrupulous in the observance of the rules of his faith.

William Shakspeare was born on the 23d of April, 1564. He was the third or fourth of the nine, ten, or perhaps eleven children who constituted the family of John. William, there is reason to believe, was the first son, the eldest of his father's hopes. Prosperity and respectability undoubtedly belonged, at this period, to his family, as its head became chief magistrate of his native

town five years afterward. We may therefore admit that Shakspeare's education, in his earlier years, was in conformity with the circumstances of his father; and when a change in his fortunes, from whatever cause it may have arisen, occasioned an interruption of his studies, he had probably acquired those first elements of a liberal education which are quite sufficient to free the mind of a superior man from the awkwardness of ignorance, and to put him in possession of those forms which he will need for the suitable expression of his thoughts. This is more than enough to explain how it was that Shakspeare was deficient in those acquirements which constitute a good education, although he possessed the elegance which is its usual accompaniment.

Shakspeare was scarcely fifteen years old when he was taken from school to assist his impoverished father in his business. It was then that, according to Aubrey, William exercised the sanguinary functions of a butcher's assistant. This supposition is considered revolting by commentators on the poet at the present day; but a circumstance related by Aubrey does not permit us to doubt its correctness, and at the same time reveals to us that his young imagination was already incapable of subjecting itself to so vile an employment without connecting therewith some ennobling idea or sentiment. "When he killed a calf," said the people of the neighborhood to Aubrey, "he would do it in a high style, and make a speech." Who can not catch a glimpse, in this story, of the tragic poet inspired by the sight of death, even in an animal, and striving to render it imposing or pathetic? Who can not picture to himself the scholar of thirteen or fourteen years of age, with his head full of his first literary attainments, and his mind impressed, perhaps, by some theat-

rical performance, elevating, in poetic transport, the animal about to fall beneath his ax to the dignity of a victim, or perhaps even to that of a tyrant?

In the year 1576, the brilliant Leicester celebrated the visit of Queen Elizabeth to Kenilworth by festivities, whose extraordinary magnificence is attested by all the chronicles of the time. Shakspeare was then twelve years old, and Kenilworth is only a few miles from Stratford. It is difficult to doubt that the family of the young poet participated, with all the population of the surrounding country, in the pleasure and admiration excited by these pompous spectacles. What an impulse would the imagination of Shakspeare not fail to receive! Nevertheless, the early years of the poet have transmitted to us, as the only sign of those singularities which may announce the presence of genius, the anecdote which I have just related; and the information which we possess regarding the amusements of his youth gives no hint whatever of the tastes and pleasures of a literary life.

We live in times of civilization and progress, when every thing has its place and rule, and when the destiny of every individual is determined by circumstances more or less imperious, but which manifest themselves at an early period. A poet begins by being a poet; he who is to become one knows it almost from infancy; poetry has been familiar to his earliest contemplation; it may have been his first taste, his first passion when the movement of the passions awakened in his heart. The young man has expressed in verse that which he does not yet feel; and when feeling truly arises within him, his first thought will be to express it in verse. Poetry has become the object of his existence—an object as important as any other—a career in which he may obtain fortune as well as

glory, and which may afford an opening to the serious ideas of his future life, as well as to the capricious sallies of his youth. In so advanced a state of society, a man can not be long ignorant, or spend much time in search of his own powers; an easy way presents itself to the view of that youthful ardor which would probably wander far astray before finding the direction best suited to it; those forces and passions from which talent will issue soon learn the secret of their destiny; and, summed up in speeches, images, and harmonious cadences, the illusions of desire, the chimeras of hope, and sometimes even the bitterness of disappointment, are exhaled without difficulty in the precocious essays of the young man.

In times when life is difficult and manners coarse, this is rarely the case in regard to the poet, who is formed by nature alone. Nothing reveals him so speedily to himself; he must have felt much before he can think he has any thing to portray; his first powers will be spent in action—in such irregular action as may be provoked by the impatience of his desires—in violent action, if any obstacle intervene between himself and the success with which his fiery imagination has promised to crown him. In vain has fate bestowed on him the noblest gifts; he can employ them only upon the single object with which he is acquainted. Heaven only knows what triumphs he will achieve by his eloquence, in what projects and for what advantages he will display the riches of his inventive faculty, among what equals his talents will raise him to the first rank, and of what society the vivacity of his mind will render him the amusement and the idol! Alas for this melancholy subjection of man to the external world! Gifted with useless power if his horizon be less extensive than his capacity of vision, he sees only that which lies around

him; and Heaven, which has bestowed treasures upon him with such lavish munificence, has done nothing for him if it does not place him in circumstances which may reveal them to his gaze. This revelation commonly arises from misfortune; when the world fails the superior man, he falls back upon himself, and becomes aware of his own resources; when necessity presses him, he collects his powers; and it is frequently through having lost the faculty of groveling upon earth that genius and virtue rise in triumph to the skies.

Neither the occupations in which Shakspeare seemed ✓ destined to spend his life, nor the amusements and companions of his leisure hours, afforded him any materials adapted to affect and absorb that imagination, the power of which had begun to agitate his being. Rushing into all the excitements which he met on his way, because nothing could satisfy him, the youth of the poet gave admission to pleasure, under whatever form it presented itself. A tradition of the banks of the Avon, which is in strict accordance with probability, gives us reason to suppose that he had only a choice of the most vulgar diversions. The anecdote is still related, it is said, by the men of Stratford and of Bidford, a neighboring village, renowned in past ages for the excellence of its beer, and also, it is added, for the unquenchable thirst of its inhabitants.

The population of the neighborhood of Bidford was divided into two classes, known by the names of *Topers* and *Sippers*. These fraternities were in the habit of challenging to drinking-bouts all those who, in the surrounding country, took credit to themselves for any merit of this kind. The youth of Stratford, when challenged in its turn, valiantly accepted the defiance; and Shakspeare, who, we are assured, was no less a connoisseur in beer

than Falstaff in Canary sack, formed a part of the joyous band, from which, doubtless, he rarely separated. But their strength was not equal to their courage. On arriving at the place of meeting, the champions of Stratford found out that the Topers had set out for a neighboring fair. The Sippers, who, to all appearance, were less formidable opponents, remained alone, and proposed to try the fortune of war. The offer was accepted; but in a short time the Stratford party were thoroughly knocked up, and reduced to the sad necessity of employing their little remaining reason in using their legs as they best might to effect a retreat. The operation was difficult, and soon became impossible. They had hardly gone a mile, when their strength failed, and the whole party bivouacked for the night under a crab-tree, which, travelers tell us, is still standing on the road from Stratford to Bidford, and is known by the name of Shakspeare's Tree. On the following morning, his comrades, refreshed and invigorated by rest and sleep, endeavored to induce him to return with them to avenge the affront they had received on the previous evening; but Shakspeare refused to go back, and, looking round on the villages which were to be seen from the point on which he stood, exclaimed, "No, I have had enough drinking with

'Piping Peabworth, dancing Marston,
Haunted Hillborough, hungry Grafton,
Dudging* Exhall, Papist Wicksford,
Beggarly Broom, and drunken Bidford.' †

This conclusion of the adventure gives rise to the presumption that debauchery had less share than gayety in

* Sulky, stubborn, in dudgeon.

† Several of these villages still retain the reputation ascribed to them by Shakspeare in this quatrain.

these excursions of Shakspeare's youth, and that verse, if not poetry, was already the natural language in which he gave expression to his feelings. Tradition has handed down to us some other impromptus of the same kind, but they are connected with anecdotes of less significance. All that we know, however, combines to portray to us his merry and quick imagination disporting itself with complacency amid the uncouth objects of his amusements; and we behold the future friend of Lord Southampton charming the rustic inhabitants of the banks of the Avon with that graceful animation, that joyous serenity of temper, and that benevolent openness of character which every where found or made for itself pleasures and friends.

Meanwhile, amid these grotesque follies, a serious event took place, and that was the marriage of Shakspeare. At the time when he contracted this important engagement, Shakspeare was not more than eighteen years of age, for his eldest daughter came into the world just a month after he had completed his nineteenth year. What motive led him thus early to undertake responsibilities which he seemed as yet but ill calculated to discharge? Anne Hathaway, his wife, the daughter of a farmer, and therefore a little inferior to him in rank, was eight years older than himself. She may, perhaps, have surpassed him in fortune, or perhaps the parents of the poet were anxious to attach him, by an advantageous marriage, to some settled occupation; it does not appear, however, that Shakspeare's marriage added to his worldly prosperity; the contrary, indeed, was the case. Perhaps love led to the union of the young couple; perhaps even it constrained their families to hasten the legitimate accomplishment of their wishes. However this may be, in less than two years after the birth of Susanna, the first-fruit of their marriage, twins

were born, a boy and a girl—the last proof of a conjugal intimacy which had at first announced itself under such favorable appearances. According to some indications, which are, in truth, doubtful and obscure, the wife of Shakspeare, who, as we shall presently see, was remembered, or rather forgotten, in a strange manner in his will, was only rarely present to his thoughts in the after part of his life; and this irrevocable engagement, so hastily contracted, seems to have been one of the most fleeting fancies of his youth.

Among the facts and conjectures which have been stored up in reference to this period of Shakspeare's life, we must place the tradition related by Aubrey, which represents him as having for some time filled the office of schoolmaster, though the truth of this anecdote is denied by nearly all his biographers. Some writers, basing their supposition upon passages contained in his works, are inclined to believe that the poet of Elizabeth attempted to subject the powers of his mind to the routine duties of a lawyer's office. According to their conjectures, the new duties of paternity compelled him to seek this employment for his talents, whereas Aubrey places his brief experience as a schoolmaster before his marriage. Nothing is, however, certain or important on these points. Of one thing only we may speak with certainty, and that is, the constant disposition of the husband of Anne Hathaway to vary, by diversions of every kind, whatever occupations might be imposed upon him by necessity. The occurrence which forced Shakspeare to leave Stratford, and gave to England her greatest poet, proves that his position as the father of a family had not effected any great alteration in the irregularity of his habits as a young man.

Jealous preservers of their game, like all gentlemen who

are not engaged in war, the possessors of parks were continually under the necessity of defending them against invasions, which, in places so open and unprotected, were as frequent as they were easy. Danger does not always diminish temptation, but frequently even makes it appear less illegitimate. A band of poachers carried on their depredations in the neighborhood of Stratford, and Shakspeare, who was eminently sociable, never refused to engage in any thing that was done in common. He was caught in the park of Sir Thomas Lucy, locked up in the keeper's lodge, where he passed the night in no very agreeable manner, and taken the next morning before Sir Thomas, in whose presence, according to all appearance, he did not extenuate his fault by submission and repentance. Shakspeare seems to have retained too merry a recollection of this circumstance of his life for us to suppose that it caused him any thing more than amusement. Sir Thomas Lucy, whom he brought on the stage some years afterward as Justice Shallow, had doubtless taken hold of his imagination less as an object of ill humor than as a pleasant caricature. Whether, in their interview, Shakspeare exercised the vivacity of his wit at the expense of his powerful adversary, and consoled himself by his success for his ill luck, or whether he enjoyed the scene with that mocking pride which is so amusing to the person who displays it, and so offensive to him who has to submit to it, we do not know, but such a supposition is in itself very probable ; and the scene in the "Second Part of Henry IV.," in which Falstaff treats with witty insolence Justice Shallow, who threatens to prosecute him for just such an offense, evidently conveys to us some of the repartees of the young poacher. They were not intended, and could not have availed, to mollify the resentment of Sir Thomas. In

whatever manner he may have vented his wrath upon the offender who was then in his power, the necessity for vengeance had become reciprocal. Shakspeare composed, and posted on Sir Thomas's gates, a ballad which was quite bad enough to thoroughly divert the public, to whom he then looked for triumph, and to excite to the last degree the anger of the man whose name it held up to popular ridicule. A criminal prosecution was commenced against the young man with such violence, that he found it necessary to provide for his own safety ; so he left his family, and traveled to London in search of an asylum and the means of subsistence.

Some of Shakspeare's biographers have supposed that pecuniary difficulties may have occasioned this flight from home. Aubrey attributes it only to his desire to find in London some opportunity for the display of his talent. But, whatever may have been the ulterior results of the poet's adventure with Sir Thomas Lucy, the fact itself can not be called in question. Shakspeare seems to have taken particular pains to state it. Of all Falstaff's follies, the only one for which he is not punished is having "beaten the men and killed the deer" of Shallow—an exploit in far greater conformity to the idea which Shakspeare may have retained of his own youth, than to the description he has given us of the old knight, who is generally vanquished instead of victorious. All the advantage, however, remains with Falstaff in this affair ; and Shallow, who is so clearly designated by the arms of the Lucy family, is nowhere so ridiculous as in the scene in which he vents his wrath against the robber of his game. The poet, indeed, takes no further notice of him, but leaves him, when he gets out of Falstaff's hands, as if he had obtained from him all that he intended to extract. The

friendly care and complacency with which Shakspeare reproduces in the piece, in reference to Shallow's armorial bearings, the play upon words which formed the basis of his ballad against Sir Thomas Lucy, have quite the appearance of a tender recollection; and assuredly, few historical anecdotes can produce in favor of their authenticity such conclusive moral evidence.

It is unfortunate that we can not say as much with regard to the employment of the early part of Shakspeare's residence in London, to the circumstances which led to his connection with the stage, and to the part which consciousness of his talent may have had in forming the resolution which directed the flight of his genius. But even the best authenticated traditions on these points are deficient alike in probability and in proofs. That craving after astonishment, which is the source of marvelous beliefs, and which will almost always make our faith incline toward the stranger of two narratives, disposes us in general to seek, for all important events, an accidental cause in what we call chance. We then admire, with singular delight, the miraculous shrewdness of that chance which we suppose to be blind, because we are blind ourselves; and our imagination rejoices in the idea of an unreasoning force presiding over the destiny of a man of genius. Thus, according to the most accredited tradition, misery alone determined the choice of Shakspeare's first occupation in London, and the care of holding horses at the door of the theatre was his first connection with the stage—his first step toward dramatic life. But the extraordinary man is always revealed by some outward sign: such was the gracefulness manifested by the newcomer in his humble duties, that soon no one would trust his horse into other hands than those of William Shaks-

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peare or his assistants. Extending his business, this favored servant of the public hired boys to wait under his inspection, who, when Will Shakspeare was summoned, were immediately to present themselves, as they were certain to be preferred when they declared themselves "Shakspeare's boys"—a title which, it is said, was long retained by the waiters that held horses at the doors of the theatres.

Such is the anecdote related by Johnson, who had it, he said, from Pope, to whom it was communicated by Rowe. Nevertheless, Rowe, Shakspeare's first biographer, has not mentioned it in his own narrative, and Johnson's authority is supported only by Cibber's "Lives of the Poets," a work to which Cibber contributed nothing but his name, and of which one of Johnson's own amanuenses was almost the sole author.

Another tradition, which had been preserved among the actors of the time, represents Shakspeare to us as filling at first the lowest position in the theatrical hierarchy, namely, that of call-boy, whose duty it was to summon the actors, when their time came to appear upon the stage. Such, in fact, would have been the gradual promotion by which the horse-holder might have raised himself to the honor of admission behind the scenes. But, when turning his idea to the theatre, is it likely that Shakspeare would have stopped short at the door? At the time of his arrival in London, in the year 1584 or 1585, he had a natural protector at the Blackfriars' Theatre; for Greene, his townsman, and probably his relative, figured there as an actor of some reputation, and also as the author of several comedies. According to Aubrey, it was with a positive intention to devote himself to the stage that Shakspeare came to London; and, even if Greene's influence

had not been able to secure his reception in a higher character than that of call-boy, it is easy to understand the rapid strides with which a superior man reaches the summit of any career into which he has once obtained admission. But it would be more difficult to conceive that, with Greene's example and protection, a theatrical career, or, at least, a desire to try his powers as an actor, would not have been Shakspeare's first ambition. The time had come when mental ambitions were kindling on every side; and dramatic poetry, which had long been numbered among the national pleasures, had at length acquired in England that importance which calls for the production of master-pieces.

(Nowhere on the Continent has a taste for poetry been so constant and popular as in Great Britain. / Germany has had her Minnesingers, France her Troubadours and *Trouvères*; but these graceful apparitions of nascent poetry rapidly ascended to the superior regions of social order, and vanished before long. The English minstrels are visible, throughout the history of their country, in a position which has been more or less brilliant according to circumstances, but which has always been recognized by society, established by its acts, and determined by its rules. They appear as a regularly-organized corporation, with its special business, influence, and rights, penetrating into all ranks of the nation, and associating in the diversions of the people as well as in the festivities of their chiefs. Heirs of the Breton bards and the Scandinavian Scalds, with whom they are incessantly confounded by English writers of the Middle Ages, the minstrels of Old England retained for a considerable length of time a portion of the authority of their predecessors. When afterward subjugated, and quickly deserted, Great Britain did not, like Gaul,

receive a universal and profound impression of Roman civilization. The Britons disappeared or retired before the Saxons and Angles ; after this period, the conquest of the Saxons by the Danes, and of the united Danes and Saxons by the Normans, only commingled upon the soil a number of peoples of common origin, of analogous habits, and almost equally barbarous character. The vanquished were oppressed, but they had not to humiliate their weakness before the brutal manners of their masters ; and the victors were not compelled to submit by degrees to the rule of the more polished manners of their new subjects. Among a nation so homogeneous, and throughout the vicissitudes of its destiny, even Christianity did not perform the part which devolved upon it elsewhere. On adopting the faith of Saint Remi, the Franks found in Gaul a Roman clergy, wealthy and influential, who necessarily undertook to modify the institutions, ideas, and manner of life, as well as the religious belief of the conquerors. The Christian clergy of the Saxons were themselves Saxons, long as uncouth and barbarous as the members of their flocks, but never estranged from, or indifferent to, their feelings and recollections. Thus the young civilization of the North grew up, in England, in all the simplicity and energy of its nature, and in complete independence of the borrowed forms and foreign sap which it elsewhere received from the old civilization of the South. This important fact, which perhaps determined the course of political institutions in England, could not fail to exercise great influence over the character and development of her poetry also.

A nation that proceeds in such strict conformity to its first impulse, and never ceases to belong entirely to itself, naturally regards itself with looks of complacency. The feeling of property attaches, in its view, to all that affects

it, and the joy of pride to all that it produces. Its poets, when inspired to relate to it its own deeds, and describe its own customs, are certain of never meeting with an ear that will not listen or a heart that will not respond ; their art is at once the charm of the lower classes of society, and the honor of the most exalted ranks. More than in any other country, poetry is united with important events in the ancient history of England. It introduced Alfred into the tents of the Danish leaders ; four centuries before, it had enabled the Saxon Bardulph to penetrate into the city of York, in which the Britons held his brother Colgrim besieged ; sixty years later, it accompanied Anlaf, king of the Danes, into the camp of Athelstan ; and, in the twelfth century, it achieved the honor of effecting the deliverance of Richard Cœur-de-Lion. These old narratives, and a host of others, however doubtful they may be supposed, prove at least how present to the imagination of the people were the art and profession of the minstrel. A fact of more modern date fully attests the power which these popular poets long exercised over the multitude : Hugh, first Earl of Chester, had decreed, in the foundation-deed of the Abbey of St. Werburgh, that the fair of Chester should be, during its whole duration, a place of asylum for criminals, excepting in the case of crimes committed in the fair itself. In the year 1212, during the reign of King John, and at the time of this fair, Ranulph, last Earl of Chester, traveling into Wales, was attacked by the Welsh, and compelled to retire to his castle of Rothelan, in which they besieged him. He succeeded in informing Roger, or John de Lacy, the constable of Chester, of his position ; this nobleman interested the minstrels who had come to the fair in the cause of the earl ; and they so powerfully excited, with their songs, the multitude of outlawed per-

sons then collected at Chester beneath the safeguard of the privilege of St. Werburgh, that they marched forth, under the command of young Hugh Dutton, the steward of Lord De Lacy, to deliver the earl from his perilous situation. It was not necessary to come to blows, for the Welsh, when they beheld the approach of this troop, thought it was an army, and raised the siege; and the grateful Ranulph immediately granted, to the minstrels of the county of Chester, various privileges, which they were to enjoy under the protection of the Lacy family, who afterward transferred this patronage to the Duttons and their descendants.*

Nor do the chronicles alone bear witness to the number and popularity of the minstrels; from time to time they are mentioned in the acts of the Legislature. In 1315, during the reign of Edward II., the Royal Council, being desirous to suppress vagabondage, forbade all persons, "except minstrels," to stop at the houses of prelates, earls, and barons, to eat and drink; nor might there enter, on each day, into such houses, "more than three or four minstrels of honor," unless the proprietor himself invited a greater number. Into the abodes of persons of humbler rank even minstrels might not enter unless they were invited; and they must then content themselves "with eating and drinking, and with such courtesy" as it should please the master of the house to add thereto. In 1316,

* During the reign of Elizabeth, when fallen from their ancient splendor, but still of such importance that the law, which would no longer protect them, was obliged to pay attention to them, the minstrels were, by an act of Parliament, classed in the same category with beggars and vagabonds; but an exception was made in favor of those protected by the Dutton family, and they continued freely to exercise their profession and privileges, in honorable remembrance of the service by which they had gained them.

while Edward was celebrating the festival of Whitsuntide, at Westminster, with his peers, a woman, "dressed in the manner of minstrels," and mounted on a large horse, caparisoned "according to the custom of minstrels," entered the banqueting-hall, rode round the tables, laid a letter before the king, and, quickly turning her horse, went away with a salute to the company. The letter displeased the king, whom it blamed for having lavished liberalities on his favorites to the detriment of his faithful servants; and the porters were reprimanded for having allowed the woman to come in. Their excuse was, "that it was not the custom ever to refuse to minstrels admission into the royal houses." During the reign of Henry VI., we find that the minstrels, who undertook to impart mirth to festivals, were frequently better paid than the priests who came to solemnize them. To the festival of the Holy Cross, at Abingdon, came twelve priests and twelve minstrels; each of the former received "fourpence," and each of the latter "two shillings and fourpence." In 1441, eight priests, from Coventry, who had been invited to Maxtoke Priory to perform an annual service, received two shillings each; but the six minstrels who had been appointed to amuse the assembled monks in the refectory had four shillings a piece, and supped with the sub-prior in the "painted chamber," which was lighted up for the occasion with eight large flambeaux of wax, the expense of which is set down in due form in the accounts of the convent.

Thus, wherever festivities took place, wherever men gathered together for amusement, in convents and fairs, in the public highways and in the castles of the nobility, the minstrels were always present, mixing with all classes of society, and charming, with their songs and tales, the inhabitants of the country and the dwellers in towns,

the rich and the poor, the farmers, the monks, and the nobles of high degree. Their arrival was at once an event and a custom, their intervention a luxury and a necessity; at no time, and in no place, could they fail to collect around them an eager crowd; they were protected by the public favor, and Parliament often had them under consideration, sometimes to recognize their rights, but more frequently to repress the abuses occasioned by their wandering life and increasing numbers.

What, then, were the manners of the people who took such enthusiastic delight in these amusements? What leisure had they for the indulgence of their taste? What opportunities, what festive occasions collected these men so frequently together, and provided these popular bards with a multitude ever ready to listen and applaud? That, beneath the brilliant sky of the South, free from the necessity of striving against natural hardships, invited by the mildness of the climate and the genial warmth of the sun to live in the open air beneath the cooling shade of their olive-trees, devolving upon their slaves the performance of all laborious duties, and uncontrolled by any domestic habits, the Greeks should have thronged around their rhapsodists, and, at a later period, crowded their open theatres, to yield their imagination to the charm of the simple narratives or pathetic delineations of poetry; or that even in our own day, under the influence of their scorching atmosphere and idle life, the Arabs, gathering round an animated story-teller, should spend entire days in following the course of his adventures—all this we can understand and explain; there the sky is not inclement, and material life requires none of those efforts which prevent men from giving themselves up to pleasures of this kind; nor are their institutions opposed to their indulgence

in such enjoyments, but all things combine, on the contrary, to render their attainment easy and natural, and to occasion numerous meetings, frequent festivities, and protracted periods of leisure. But it was in a northern climate, beneath the sway of a cold and severe nature, in a society partially subject to the feudal system, and among a people living a difficult and laborious life, that the English minstrels found repeated opportunities for the exercise of their art, and were always sure that a crowd would collect to witness their performance.

The reason of this is, that the habits of England, being formed by the influence of the same causes that led to the establishment of her political institutions, early assumed that character of agitation and publicity which calls for the appearance of a popular poetry. In other countries, the general tendency was to the separation of the various social conditions, and even to the isolation of individuals. In England, every thing combined to bring them into contact and connection. The principle of common deliberation upon matters of common interest, which is the foundation of all liberty, prevailed in all the institutions of England, and presided over all the customs of the country. The freemen of the rural districts and the towns never ceased to meet together for the discussion and transaction of their common affairs. The county courts, the jury, corporate associations, and elections of all kinds, multiplied occasions of meeting, and diffused in every direction the habits of public life. That hierarchical organization of feudalism, which, on the Continent, extended from the poorest gentleman to the most powerful monarch, and was incessantly stimulating the vanity of every man to leave his own sphere and pass into the rank of suzerain, was never completely established in Great Britain. The nobility of

the second order, by separating themselves from the great barons, in order to take their place at the head of the commons, returned, so to speak, into the body of the nation, and adopted its manners as well as assumed its rights. It was on his own estate, among his tenants, farmers, and servants, that the gentleman established his importance; and he based it upon the cultivation of his lands and the discharge of those local magistracies which, by placing him in connection with the whole of the population, necessitated the concurrence of public opinion, and provided the adjacent district with a centre around which it might rally. Thus, while active rights brought equals into communication, rural life created a bond of union between the superior and his inferior; and agriculture, by the community of its interests and labors, bound the whole population together by ties, which, descending successively from class to class, were in some sort terminated and sealed in the earth, the immutable basis of their union.

Such a state of society leads to competence and confidence; and where competence reigns and confidence is felt, the necessity of common enjoyment soon arises. Men who are accustomed to meet together for business will meet together for pleasure also; and when the serious life of the land-owner is spent among his fields, he does not remain a stranger to the joys of the people who cultivate or surround them. Continual and general festivals gave animation to the country life of Old England. What was their primary origin? What traditions and customs served as their foundation? How did the progress of rustic prosperity lead gradually to this joyous movement of meetings, banquets, and games? It is of little use to know the cause; the fact itself is most worthy of our observation; and in the sixteenth century, when civil discord

had been brought to a term, we may follow it in all its brilliant details. At Christmas, before the gates of the castles, the herald, bearing the arms of the family, thrice shouted *Largesse*!

"Then opened wide the baron's hall
To vassal, tenant, serf, and all;
Power laid his rod of rule aside,
And ceremony doffed his pride.
The heir, with roses in his shoes,
That night might village partner choose;
The lord, underogating, share
The vulgar game of 'post and pair.'"^{*}

Who shall describe the general joy and hospitality, the roaring fire in the hall, the well-spread table, the beef and pudding, and the abundance of good cheer which was then to be found in the house of the farmer as well as in the mansion of the gentleman. The dance, when the head began to swim with wassail; the songs of minstrels, and tales of by-gone days, when the party had become tired of dancing, were the pleasures which then reigned throughout England, when

"All hail'd, with uncontroll'd delight
And general voice, the happy night,
That to the cottage, as the crown,
Brought tidings of salvation down.
* * * * *
'Twas Christmas broach'd the mightiest ale;
'Twas Christmas told the merriest tale;
A Christmas gambol oft could cheer
The poor man's heart through half the year."[†]

These Christmas festivities lasted for twelve days, varied by a thousand pleasures, kindled by the good wishes and presents of New Year's Day, and terminated by the Feast of Kings on Twelfth Day. But soon after came

^{*} Scott's "Marmion," introduction to Canto sixth.

[†] Ibid.

Plow Monday, the day on which work was resumed, and the first day of labor also was marked by a feast.

“Good housewives, whom God has enriched enough,
Forget not the feasts that belong to the plow,”

says old Tusser, in his quaint rural poems.* The spindle also had its festival. The harvest feast was one of equality, and an avowal, as it were, of those mutual necessities which bring men into union. On that day, masters and servants collected round the same table, and, mingling in the same conversation, did not appear to be brought into contact with each other by the complaisance of a superior desirous of rewarding his inferior, but by an equal right to the pleasures of the day :

• “For all that clear’d the crop or till’d the ground
Are guests by right of custom—old and young ;

* * * * *

Here once a year distinction low’rs its crest,
The master, servant, and the merry guest,
Are equal all ; and round the happy ring
The reaper’s eyes exulting glances fling,
And, warm’d with gratitude, he quits his place,
With sun-burn’d hands and ale-enliven’d face,
Refills the jug his honor’d host to tend,
To serve at once the master and the friend ;
Proud thus to meet his smiles, to share his tale,
His nuts, his conversation, and his ale.
Such were the days—of days long past I sing.”†

Sowing-time, sheep-shearing, indeed, every epoch of interest in rural life, was celebrated by similar meetings and banquets, and by games of all kinds. But what day could equal the first of May, brilliant with the joys of

* Thomas Tusser, a poet of the sixteenth century, was born about 1515, and died in 1583. He was the author of some English Georgics, under the title of “Five hundred points of good husbandry, united to as many of good huswifery.” † Bloomfield’s “Farmer’s Boy,” p. 40, ed. 1845.

youth and the hopes of the year ? Scarce had the rising sun announced the arrival of this festive morn, than the entire youthful population hastened into the woods and meadows, to the river-bank and hill-side, accompanied by the sounds of music, to gather their harvest of flowers ; and, returning laden with hawthorn and verdure, adorned the doors and windows of their houses with their spoils, covered with blossoms the May-pole which they had cut in the forest, and crowned with garlands the horns of the oxen which were to drag it in triumph through the village. Herrick, a contemporary of Shakspeare, thus invites his mistress to go a Maying :

“ Get up, get up for shame, the blooming morn
Upon her wings presents the god unshorn.

See how Aurora throws her fair
Fresh-quilted colors through the air ;
Get up, sweet slug-a-bed, and see
The dew bespangling herb and tree.

Each flower has wept, and bow'd toward the east
Above an hour since, yet you are not dress'd,

Nay, not so much as out of bed ;
When all the birds have matins said,
And sung their thankful hymns : 'tis sin,
Nay, profanation, to keep in,

When, as a thousand virgins on this day,
Spring sooner than the lark to fetch in May.

• Come, my Corinna, come ; and, coming, mark
How each field turns a street, each street a park
Made green, and trimm'd with trees ; see how
Devotion gives each house a bough
Or branch ; each porch, each door, ere this,
An ark, a tabernacle is,
Made up of white thorn neatly interwove,
As if here were those cooler shades of love.”

The elegance of the cottages on May morning was imitated by the castles ; and the young gentlefolks, as well as the lads and maidens of the village, went forth into the

fields in search of flowers. Joy is sure to introduce equality into pleasures ; the symbols of joy never vary, and are changed as little by difference of rank as by difference of season. Here enjoyment, led by abundance, seems to spend the year in continual festivities. Just as the first of May displays its profusion of verdure, as sheap-shearing fills the streets with flowers, and harvest-home is adorned with ears of corn, so Christmas will decorate the walls with ivy, holly, and evergreen. Just as dances, races, shows, and rustic sports cause the sky of spring to resound with their joyous tones, so games in which

“ White shirts supplied the masquerade,
And smutted cheeks the visors made,”

will waken the echoes, on the cold December nights, with shouts of gayety ; and the May-pole and Christmas log will alike be borne in triumph and extolled in song.

Amid these games, festivals, and banquets, at these innumerable friendly meetings, and in this joyous and habitual conviviality (to use the national expression), the minstrels took their place and sang their songs. The subjects of these songs were the traditions of the country, the adventures of popular heroes as well as of noble champions, the exploits of Robin Hood against the sheriff of Nottingham, as well as the conflicts of the Percies with the Douglas clan. Thus the public manners called for poetry ; thus poetry originated in the manners of the people, and became connected with all the interests, and with the entire existence, of a population accustomed to live, to act, to prosper, and to rejoice in common.

How could dramatic poetry have remained unknown to a people of such a character, so frequently assembling together, and so fond of holidays ? We have every reason to believe that it was more than once introduced into the

games of the minstrels. The ancient writers speak of them under the names of *mimi*, *joculatores*, and *histriones*. Women were frequently connected with their bands; and several of their ballads, among others that of "The Nut-brown Maid," are evidently in the form of dialogue. The minstrels, however, rather formed the national taste, and directed it to the drama, than originated the drama itself. The first attempts at a true theatrical performance are difficult and expensive. The co-operation of a public power is indispensable; and it is only in important and general solemnities that the effect produced by the play can possibly correspond to the efforts of imagination and labor which it has cost. England, like France, Italy, and Spain, was indebted for her first theatrical performances to the festivals of the clergy; only they were, it would appear, of earlier origin in that country than elsewhere. The performance of Mysteries in England can be traced back as far as the twelfth century, and probably originated at a still earlier period. But in France, the clergy, after having erected theatres, were not slow to denounce them. They had claimed the privilege in the hope of being able, by the means of such performances, to maintain or stimulate the conquests of the faith; but ere long they began to dread their effects, and abandoned their employment. The English clergy were more intimately associated with the tastes, habits, and diversions of the people. The Church, also, took advantage of that universal conviviality which I have just described. Was any great religious ceremony to be celebrated? or was any parish in want of funds? A *Church-ale** was announced; the church-wardens brewed some beer, and sold

* Also called Whitsun-ale. Beer was so intimately connected with the popular festivals that the word *ale* had become synonymous with *holiday*.

it to the people at the door of the church, and to the rich in the interior of the church itself. Every one contributed his money, presence, provisions, and mirth to the festival; the joy of good works was augmented by the pleasures of good cheer, and the piety of the rich rejoiced to exceed, by their gifts, the price demanded. It often happened that several parishes united to hold the *Church-ale* by turns for the profit of each. The ordinary games followed these meetings; the minstrel, the morris-dance, and the performance of Robin Hood, with Maid Marian and the Hobby-horse, were never absent. The seasons of confession, Easter and Whitsuntide, also furnished the Church and the people with periodical opportunities for common rejoicings. Thus familiar with the popular manners, the English clergy, when offering new pleasures to the people, thought less of modifying them than of turning them to account; and when they perceived the fondness of the people for dramatic performances, whatever the subject might be, they had no idea of renouncing so powerful a means of gaining popularity. In 1378, the choristers of St. Paul's complained to Richard II. that certain ignorant fellows had presumed to perform histories from the Old Testament, "to the great prejudice of the clergy." After this period, the Mysteries and Moralities never ceased to be, both in churches and convents, a favorite amusement of the nation, and a leading occupation of the ecclesiastics. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, an Earl of Northumberland, who was a great protector of literature, established, as a rule of his household, that the sole business of one of his chaplains should be to compose interludes. Toward the end of his reign, Henry VIII. forbade the Church to continue these performances, which, in the wavering state of his belief, were displeasing to the king,

and offended him sometimes as a Catholic and sometimes as a Protestant. But they reappeared after his death, and were sanctioned by such high authority, that the young king, Edward VI., himself composed a piece against the Papists, entitled "The Whore of Babylon;" and Queen Mary, in her turn, commanded the performance, in the churches, of popular dramas favorable to Popery. Finally, in 1569, we find the choristers of St. Paul's, "clothed in silk and satin," playing profane pieces in Elizabeth's chapel, in the different royal houses; and they were so well skilled in their profession, that, in Shakspeare's time, they constituted one of the best and most popular troops of actors in London.

Far, therefore, from opposing or seeking to change the taste of the people for theatrical representations, the English clergy hastened to gratify it. Their influence, it is true, gave to the works which they brought on the stage a more serious and moral character than was possessed in other countries by compositions dependent upon the whims of the public, and cursed by the anathemas of the Church. Notwithstanding its coarseness of ideas and language, the English drama, which became so licentious in the reign of Charles II., appears chaste and pure in the middle of the sixteenth century, when compared to the first essays of dramatic composition in France. But it did not the less continue to be popular in its character, ignorant of all scientific regularity, and faithful to the national taste. The clergy would have lost much by endeavoring to suppress theatrical performances. They possessed no exclusive privilege; and numerous competitors vied with them for applause and success. Robin Hood and Maid Marian, the Lord of Misrule and the Hobby-Horse, had not yet disappeared. Traveling actors, attached to the service of the

powerful nobles, traversed the counties of England under their auspices, and obtained, by favor of a gratuitous performance before the mayor, aldermen, and their friends, the right of exercising their profession in the various towns, the court-yards of inns usually serving as their theatre. As they were in a position to give greater pomp to their exhibitions, and thus to attract a larger number of spectators, the clergy struggled successfully against their rivals, and even maintained a marked predominance, but always upon condition of adapting their representations to the feelings, habits, and imaginative character of the people, who had been formed to a taste for poetry by their own festivals and by the songs of the minstrels.

Such were the condition and tendency of dramatic poetry, when, at the commencement of the reign of Elizabeth, it appeared threatened by a two-fold danger. As it daily became more popular, it at last awakened the anxiety of religious severity and fired the ambition of literary pedantry. The national taste found itself attacked, almost simultaneously, by the anathemas of the Reformers and the pretensions of men of letters.

If these two classes of enemies had united in their opposition to the drama, it would, perhaps, have fallen a victim to their attacks. But while the Puritans wished to destroy it, men of letters only desired to get it into their own hands. It was, therefore, defended by the latter when the former inveighed against its existence. Some influential citizens of London obtained from Elizabeth the temporary suppression of stage-plays within the jurisdiction of the civic authorities; but, beyond that jurisdiction, the Blackfriars' Theatre and the court of the Queen still retained their dramatic privileges. The Puritans, by their sermons, may have alarmed some few consciences, and oc-

casioned some few scruples ; and perhaps, also, some sudden conversions may here and there have deprived the May-day games of the performance of the Hobby-Horse, their greatest ornament, and the special object of the wrath of the preachers. But the time of the power of the Puritans had not yet arrived, and, to obtain decisive success, it was too much to have to overcome at once the national taste and the taste of the court.

Elizabeth's court would well have liked to be classical. Theological discussions had made learning fashionable. At that time it was an essential part of the education of a noble lady to be able to read Greek, and to distill strong waters. The known taste of the queen had added to these the gallantries of ancient mythology. "When she paid a visit at the house of any of her nobility," says Warton, "at entering the hall she was saluted by the Penates, and conducted to her privy-chamber by Mercury. The pages of the family were converted into wood-nymphs, who peeped from every bower ; and the footmen gamboled over the lawns in the figure of Satyrs. When she rode through the streets of Norwich, Cupid, at the command of the mayor and aldermen, advancing from a group of gods who had left Olympus to grace the procession, gave her a golden arrow, which, under the influence of such irresistible charms, was sure to wound the most obdurate heart: 'a gift,' says Holinshed, 'which her majesty, now verging to her fiftieth year, received very thankfully.'"*

But the court may strive in vain ; it is not the purveyor of its own pleasures ; it rarely makes choice of them, invents them even less frequently, and generally receives them at the hands of men who make it their business to provide for its amusement. The empire of classical lit-

* Warton's "History of English Poetry," vol. iii., p. 492, 493.

erature, which was established in France before the foundation of the stage, was the work of men of letters, who derived protection from, and felt justly proud of, the exclusive possession of a foreign erudition which raised them above the rest of the nation. The court of France submitted to the guidance of the men of letters; and the nation at large, undecided how to act, and destitute of those institutions which might have given authority to its habits and influence to its tastes, formed into groups, as it were, around the court. In England the drama had taken precedence of classic lore; ancient history and mythology found a popular poetry and creed in possession of the means of delighting the minds of the people; and the study of the classics, which became known at a late period, and at first only by the medium of French translations, was introduced as one of those foreign fashions by which a few men may render themselves remarkable, but which take root only when they fall into harmonious accordance with the national taste. The court itself sometimes affected, in evidence of its attainments, exclusive admiration for ancient literature; but as soon as it stood in need of amusement, it followed the example of the general public; and, indeed, it was not easy to pass from the exhibition of a bear-baiting to the pretensions of classical severity, even according to the ideas then entertained regarding it.

The stage, therefore, remained under the almost undisputed government of the general taste; and science attempted only very timid invasions of the prerogative. In 1561, Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, procured the representation, in presence of Elizabeth, of his tragedy of "Gorboduc," or "Forrex and Porrex," which critics have considered as the dramatic glory of the time preceding Shakspeare. This was, in fact, the first play which was

properly divided into acts and scenes, and written throughout in an elevated tone ; but it was far from pretending to a strict observance of the unities, and the example of a very tiresome work, in which every thing was done by means of conversation, did not prove very alluring either to authors or actors. About the same period ; other pieces appeared on the stage, in greater conformity to the natural instincts of the country, such as "The Pinner of Wakefield," and "Jeronimo, or the Spanish Tragedy ;" and for these the public openly demonstrated their preference. Lord Buckhurst himself was able to exercise no influence over the dominant taste, except by remaining faithful to it. His "Mirroure for Magistrates," a collection of incidents from the history of England, narrated in a dramatic form, passed rapidly into the hands of all readers, and became an inexhaustible mine for poets to draw from. Works of this kind were best suited to minds educated by the songs of the minstrels ; and this was the erudition most relished by the majority of the gentlefolks of the country, whose reading seldom extended beyond a few collections of tales, ballads, and old chronicles. The drama fearlessly appropriated to itself subjects so familiar to the multitude ; and historical plays, under the name of "Histories," delighted the English with the narrative of their own deeds, the pleasant sound of national names, the exhibition of popular customs, and the delineation of the mode of life of all classes, which were all comprised in the political history of a people who have ever taken part in the administration of their national affairs.

Beside these national histories, some few incidents from ancient histories, or the annals of other nations, took their place, commonly disfigured by the mixture of fabulous events. But neither authors nor public felt the slightest

anxiety with regard to their origin and nature. They were invariably overloaded with those fantastic details, and those forms borrowed from the common habits of life, with which children so often decorate the objects which they are obliged to picture to themselves by the aid of their imagination alone. Thus Tamburlaine appeared in his chariot drawn by the kings whom he had conquered, and complaining bitterly of the slow pace and miserable appearance of his team. On the other hand, Vice, the usual buffoon of dramatic compositions, performed, under the name of Ambidexter, the principal part in Preston's tragedy of "Cambyses," which was thus converted into a Morality which would have been intolerably tedious if the spectators had not had the gratification of seeing a prevaricating judge flayed alive upon the stage, by means of "a false skin," as we are duly informed by the author. The performance, though almost entirely deficient in decorations and changes of scenery, was animated by material movement, and by the representation of sensible objects. When tragedies were performed, the stage was hung with black; and in an inventory of the properties of a troop of comedies, we find enumerated, "the Moor's limbs, four Turks' heads, old Mahomet's head, one wheel and frame in the siege of London, one great horse with his legs, one dragon, one rock, one cage, one tomb, and one hell's mouth."* This is a curious specimen of the means of interest which it was then thought necessary to employ upon the stage.

And yet, at this period, Shakspeare had already appeared! and, before Shakspeare's advent, the stage had constituted, not only the chief gratification of the multitude, but the favorite amusement of the most distinguish-

* Malone's Shakspeare, vol. iii., p. 309-313 ed. 1821.

ed men! Lord Southampton went to the theatre every day. As early as 1570, one, and probably two, regular theatres existed in London. In 1583, a short time after the temporary victory gained by the Puritans over the performance of stage-plays in that city, there were eight troops of actors in London, each of whom performed three times a week. In 1592, that is, eight years before the time when Hardy at length obtained permission to open a theatre in Paris, which had previously been impossible on account of the useless privilege possessed by the "Brethren of the Passion," an English pamphleteer complained most indignantly of "some shallow-brained censors," who had dared "mightily to oppugn" the performance of plays, which, he says, are frequented by all "men that are their own masters—as gentlemen of the Court, the Inns of Court, and the number of captains and soldiers about London."* Finally, in 1596, so vast a multitude of persons went by water to the theatres, which were nearly all situated on the banks of the Thames, that it became necessary considerably to augment the number of boatmen.

A taste so universal and so eager could not long remain satisfied with coarse and insipid productions; a pleasure which is so ardently sought after by the human mind, calls for all the efforts and all the power of human genius. This national movement now stood in need only of a man of genius, capable of receiving its impulse, and raising the public to the highest regions of art. By what stimulus was Shakspeare prompted to undertake this glorious task? What circumstance revealed to him his mission? What sudden light illumined his genius? These questions we

* See Nash, "Pierce Penniless's Supplication to the Devil," p. 59, reprinted by the Shakspeare Society in 1842.

can not answer. Just as a beacon shines in the night-time without disclosing to our view the prop by which it is supported, so Shakspeare's mind appears to us, in his works, in isolation, as it were, from his person. Scarcely, throughout the long series of the poet's successes, can we discern any traces of the man, and we possess no information whatever regarding those early times of which he alone was able to give us an account. As an actor, it does not appear that he distinguished himself above his fellows. The poet is rarely adapted for action; his strength lies beyond the world of reality, and he attains his lofty elevation only because he does not employ his powers in bearing the burdens of earth. Shakspeare's commentators will not consent to deny him any of those successes to which he could possibly lay claim, and the excellent advice which Hamlet gives to the actors at the court of Denmark has been quoted in support of a theory that Shakspeare must have executed marvelously well that which he so thoroughly understood. But Shakspeare showed equal acquaintance with the characters of great kings, mighty warriors, and consummate villains, and yet no one would be likely to conclude from this that he was capable of being a Richard the Third or an Iago. Fortunately, we have reason to believe that applause, which was then so easily obtained, was not bestowed in a sufficient degree to tempt an ambition which the character of the young poet would have rendered it too easy for him to satisfy; and Rowe, his first historian, informs us that his dramatic merits "soon distinguished him, if not as an extraordinary actor, yet as an excellent writer."

Years nevertheless elapsed before Shakspeare made his appearance on the stage as an author. He arrived in London in 1584, and is not known to have engaged in any

employment unconnected with the theatre during his residence in the metropolis ; but "Pericles," his first work, according to Dryden, though many of his other critics and admirers have rejected it as spurious, did not appear until 1590. How was it possible that, amid the novel scenes that surrounded him, his active and fertile mind, whose rapidity, according to his contemporaries, "equaled that of his pen," could have remained for six years without producing any thing ? In 1593, he published his poem of "Venus and Adonis," which he dedicated to Lord Southampton as "the first heir of his invention ;" and yet, during the two preceding years, two dramas which are now ascribed to him had achieved success upon the stage. The composition of the poem may have preceded them, although the dedication was written subsequently to their production ; but if the "Venus and Adonis" is anterior to all his dramas, we must come to the conclusion that, in the midst of his theatrical life, Shakspeare's eminently dramatic genius was able to engage in other labors, and that his first productions were not intended for the stage.

A more probable supposition is that Shakspeare spent his labor, at first, upon works which were not his own, and which his genius, still in its novitiate, has been unable to rescue from oblivion. Dramatic productions, at that time, were less the property of the author who had conceived them than of the actors who had received them. This is always the case when theatres begin to be established ; the construction of a building and the expenses of a performance are far greater risks to run than the composition of a drama. To the founder of the theatre alone is dramatic art indebted, at its origin, for that popular concourse which establishes its existence, and which the talent of the poet could never have drawn together with-

out his assistance: When Hardy founded his theatre at Paris, each troop of actors had its poet, who was paid a regular salary for the composition of plays, just in the same way as the chaplain of the Earl of Northumberland. In the time of Shakspeare, the English stage had made much greater progress, and already enjoyed the facility of selection and the advantages of competition. The poet no longer disposed of his labor beforehand, but he sold it when completed; and the publication of a piece, for permission to perform which an author had been paid, was regarded, if not as a robbery, at least as a want of delicacy which he found it difficult to defend or excuse. While dramatic property was in this state, the share which the self-love of an author might claim in it was held in very low account; the success of a work which he had sold did not belong to him, and its literary merit became, in the hands of the actors, a property which they turned to account by all the improvements which their experience could suggest. Transported suddenly into the midst of that moving picture of human vicissitudes which even the paltriest dramatic productions then heaped upon the stage, the imagination of Shakspeare doubtless beheld new fields opening to its view. What interest, what truthfulness might he not infuse into the store of facts presented to him with such coarse baldness! What pathetic effects might he not educe from all this theatrical parade! The matter was before him, waiting for spirit and life. Why had not Shakspeare attempted to communicate them to it? However confused and incomplete his first views may have been, they were rays of light arising to disperse the darkness and disorder of chaos. Now a superior man possesses the power of making the light which illumines his own eyes evident to the eyes of others. Shakspeare's com-

rades doubtless soon perceived what new successes he might obtain for them by remodeling the uncouth works which composed their dramatic stock ; and a few brilliant touches imparted to a ground-work which he had not painted—a few pathetic or terrible scenes intercalated in an action which he had not directed—and the art of turning to account a plan which he had not conceived, were, in all probability, his earliest labors, and his first presages of glory. In 1592, a time at which we can scarcely be certain that a single original and complete work had issued from his pen, a jealous and discontented author, whose compositions he had probably improved too greatly, speaks of him, in the fantastic style of the time, as an “upstart crow, beautified with our feathers ; an absolute *Johannes Factotum*, who is, in his own conceit, the only Shakespeare in the country.”*

It was, we are inclined to believe, while engaged in these labors, more conformable to the necessities of his position than to the freedom of his genius, that Shakspeare sought to recreate his mind by the composition of his “Venus and Adonis.” Perhaps even the idea of this work was not then entirely new to him ; for several sonnets, relating to the same subject, occur in a volume of poems published in 1596, under Shakspeare’s name, and the title of which, “The Passionate Pilgrim,” is expressive of the condition of a man wandering, in affliction, far from his native land. The amusement of a few melancholy hours, from which the age and character of the poet had not availed to preserve him at his entrance upon a painful or uncertain destiny—these little works are doubtless the first productions which Shakspeare’s poetic genius allowed him to avow ; and several of them, as well as the

* Greene’s “Groatworth of Wit,” published in 1592.

poem of "Venus and Adonis," need to be excused, it must be confessed, by the effervescence of a youth too much addicted to dreams of pleasure not to attempt to reproduce them in all their forms. In "Venus and Adonis," the poet, absolutely carried away by the voluptuous power of his subject, seems entirely to have lost sight of its mythological wealth. Venus, stripped of the prestige of divinity, is nothing but a beautiful courtesan, endeavoring unsuccessfully, by all the prayers, tears, and artifices of love, to stimulate the languid desires of a cold and disdainful youth. Hence arises a monotony which is not redeemed by the simple gracefulness and poetic merit of many passages, and which is augmented by the division of the poem into stanzas of six lines, the last two of which almost invariably present a *jeu d'esprit*. But a metre singularly free from irregularities, a cadence full of harmony, and a versification which had never before been equaled in England, announced the "honey-tongued poet," and the poem of "Lucrece" appeared soon afterward to complete those epic productions which for some time sufficed to maintain his glory.

After having, in "Venus and Adonis," employed the most lascivious colors to depict the pangs of unsatisfied desire, Shakspeare has described, in "The Rape of Lucrece," with the chastest pen, and by way of reparation, as it were, the progress and triumph of criminal lust. The refinement of the ideas, the affectation of the style, and the merits of the versification, are the same in both works; the poetry in the second is less brilliant, but more emphatic, and abounds less in graceful images than in lofty thoughts; but we can already discern indications of a profound acquaintance with the feelings of man, and great talent in developing them in a dramatic form, by means

of the slightest circumstances of life. Thus Lucrece, weighed down by a sense of her shame, after a night of despair, summons a young slave at dawn of day, to dispatch him to the camp with a letter to call her husband home; the slave, being of a timid and simple character, blushes on appearing in the presence of his mistress; but Lucrece, filled with the consciousness of her dishonor, imagines that he blushes at her shame; and, under the influence of the idea that her secret is discovered, she stands trembling and confused before her slave.

One detail in this poem seems to indicate the epoch at which it was written. Lucrece, to while away her grief, stops to contemplate a picture of the siege of Troy; and, in describing it, the poet complacently refers to the effects of perspective:

"The scalps of many, almost hid behind,
To jump up higher seem'd to mock the mind."

This is the observation of a man very recently struck with the wonders of art, and a symptom of that poetic surprise which the sight of unknown objects awakens in an imagination capable of being moved thereby. Perhaps we may conclude, from this circumstance, that the poem of "Lucrece" was composed during the early part of Shakspeare's residence in London.

But whatever may be the date of these two poems, their place among Shakspeare's works is at a period far more remote from us than any of those which filled up his dramatic career. In this career he marched forward, and drew his age after him; and his weakest essays in dramatic poetry are indicative of the prodigious power which he displayed in his last works. Shakspeare's true history belongs to the stage alone; after having seen it there, we can not seek for it elsewhere; and Shakspeare himself no

longer quitted it. His sonnets—fugitive pieces which the poetic and sprightly grace of some lines would not have rescued from oblivion but for the curiosity which attaches to the slightest traces of a celebrated man—may here and there cast a little light on the obscure or doubtful portions of his life ; but, in a literary point of view, we have in future to consider him only as a dramatic poet.

I have already stated what was the first employment of his talents in this kind of composition. Great uncertainty has resulted therefrom with regard to the authenticity of some of his works. Shakspeare had a hand in a vast number of dramas ; and probably, even in his own time, it would not have been always easy to assign his precise share in them all. For two centuries, criticism has been engaged in determining the boundaries of his true possessions ; but facts are wanting for this investigation, and literary judgments have usually been influenced by a desire to strengthen some favorite theory on the subject. It is, therefore, almost impossible, at the present day, to pronounce with certainty upon the authenticity of Shakspeare's doubtful plays. Nevertheless, after having read them, I can not coincide with M. Schlegel—for whose acumen I have the highest respect—in attributing them to him. The baldness which characterizes these pieces, the heap of unexplained incidents and incoherent sentiments which they contain, and their precipitate progress through undeveloped scenes toward events destitute of interest, are unmistakable signs by which, in times still rude, we may recognize fecundity devoid of genius ; signs so contrary to the nature of Shakspeare's talent, that I can not even discover in them the defects which may have disfigured his earliest essays. Among the multitude of

plays which, by common consent, the latest editors have rejected as being at least doubtful, "Loocrine," "Thomas, Lord Cromwell," "The London Prodigal," "The Puritan," and "The Yorkshire Tragedy," scarcely present the slightest indications of having been retouched by any hand superior to that of their original author. "Sir John Oldcastle," which is more interesting, and composed with greater good sense than any of the foregoing, is animated in some scenes by a comic humor akin to that of Shakspeare. But if it be true that genius, even in its lowest abasement, gives forth some luminous rays to betray its presence; if Shakspeare, in particular, bore that distinctive mark which, in one of his sonnets, makes him say, in reference to his writings,

"That every word doth almost tell my name,"*

assuredly he had not to reproach himself with the production of that execrable accumulation of horrors which, under the name of "Titus Andronicus," has been foisted upon the English people as a dramatic work, and in which, Heaven be thanked! there is not a single spark of truth, or scintillation of genius, which can give evidence against him.

Of the doubtful plays, "Pericles" is, in my opinion, the only one to which the name of Shakspeare can be attached with any degree of certainty; or at least, it is the only one in which we find evident traces of his co-operation, especially in the scene in which Pericles meets and recognizes his daughter Marina, whom he believed dead. If, during Shakspeare's lifetime, any other man could have combined power and truth in so high a degree in the delineation of the natural feelings, England would then have

* Sonnet 76, Knight's Library edition, vol. xii., p. 152.

possessed another poet. Nevertheless, though it contains one fine scene and many scattered beauties, the play is a bad one; it is destitute of reality and art, and is entirely alien to Shakspeare's system: it is interesting only as marking the point from which he started; and it seems to belong to his works as a last monument of that which he overthrew—as a remnant of that anti-dramatic scaffolding for which he was about to substitute the presence and movement of vitality.

The spectacles of barbarous nations always appeal to their sense of vision before they attempt to influence their imagination by the aid of poetry. The taste of the English for those *pageants*, which, during the Middle Ages, constituted the chief attraction of public solemnities throughout Europe, exercised great influence over the stage in England. During the first half of the fifteenth century, the monk Lydgate, when singing the misfortunes of Troy with that liberty of erudition which English literature tolerated to a greater extent than that of any other country, describes a dramatic performance which, he says, took place within the walls of Troy. He describes the poet, "with deadly face all devoid of blood," rehearsing from a pulpit "all the noble deeds that were historical of kings, princes, and worthy emperors." At the same time,

"Amydde the theatre, shrowded in a tent
There came out men, gastful of their cheres,
Disfigured their faces with vyseres,
Playing by signes in the people's sight
That the poete songe hath on height."

Lydgate, a monk and poet, equally ready to rhyme a legend or a ballad, to compose verses for a masquerade or to sketch the plan of a religious pantomime, had probably figured in some performance of this kind; and his descrip-

tion certainly gives us an accurate idea of the dramatic exhibitions of his time. When dialogue-poetry had taken possession of the stage, pantomime remained as an ornament and addition to the performance. In most of the plays anterior to Shakspeare, personages of an almost invariably emblematical character appear between the acts, to indicate the subjects of the scenes about to follow. An historical or allegorical personage is introduced to explain these emblems, and to *moralize* the piece, that is, to point out the moral truths contained in it. In "Pericles," Gower, a poet of the fourteenth century—celebrated for his "Confessio Amantis," in which he has related, in English verse, the story of Pericles as told by more ancient writers—comes upon the stage to state to the public, not that which is about to happen, but such anterior facts as require to be explained, that the drama may be properly understood. Sometimes his narrative is interrupted and supplemented by the dumb representation of the facts themselves. Gower then explains all that the mute action has not elucidated. He appears not only at the commencement of the play and between the acts, but even during the course of an act, whenever it is found convenient to abridge by narrative some less interesting part of the action, in order to apprise the spectator of a change of place or a lapse of time, and thus to transport his imagination wherever a new scene requires its presence. This was decidedly a step in advance; a useless accessory had become a means of development and of clearness. But Shakspeare speedily rejected this factitious and awkward contrivance as unworthy of his art; and ere long he inspired the action with power to explain itself, to make itself understood on appearance, and thus to give dramatic performances that aspect of life and reality which could

never be attained by a machinery which thus coarsely displayed its wheel-works to public view. Among Shakspeare's subsequent dramas, "Henry V." and the "Winter's Tale" are the only ones in which the chorus intervenes to relieve the poet in the difficult task of conveying his audience through time and space. The chorus of "Romeo and Juliet," which was retained perhaps as a relic of ancient usage, is only a poetic ornament, quite unconnected with the action of the play. After the production of "Pericles," dumb pageants completely disappeared; and if the three parts of "Henry VI." do not attest, by their power of composition, a close relationship to Shakspeare's system, nothing, at least in their material forms, is out of harmony with it.

Of these three pieces, the first has been absolutely denied to Shakspeare; and it is, in my opinion, equally difficult to believe that it is entirely his composition, and that the admirable scene between Talbot and his son does not bear the impress of his hand. Two old dramas, printed in 1600, contain the plan, and even numerous details of the second and third parts of "Henry VI." These two original works were long attributed to our poet, as a first essay which he afterward perfected. But this opinion will not bear an attentive examination; and all the probabilities, both literary and historical, unite in granting to Shakspeare, in the last two parts of "Henry VI.," no other share than that of a more important and extensive remodeling than he was able to bestow upon other works submitted to his correction. Brilliant developments, imagery conceived with taste and followed up with skill, and a lofty, animated, and picturesque style, are the characteristics which distinguish the great poet's work from the primitive production which he had merely beautified with his magnifi-

cent coloring. As regards their plan and arrangement, the original pieces have undergone no change; and even after the composition of the three parts of "Henry VI.," Shakspeare might still speak of the "Venus and Adonis" as the "first heir of his invention."

But when will this invention finally display itself in all its freedom? When will Shakspeare walk alone on that stage on which he is to achieve such mighty progress? Some of his biographers place the "Comedy of Errors," and "Love's Labor Lost"—the first two works the honors and criticisms of which he has to share with no one—before "Henry VI." in order of time. In this unimportant discussion, one fact alone is certain, and becomes a new subject of surprise. The first dramatic work which the imagination of Shakspeare truly produced was a comedy; and this comedy will be followed by others: he has at last taken wing, but not as yet toward the realms of tragedy. Corneille also began with comedy, but he was then ignorant of his own powers, and almost ignorant of the drama. The familiar scenes of life had alone presented themselves to his thoughts; and the scenes of his comedies are laid in his native town, in the Galerie du Palais and in the Place Royale. His subjects are timidly borrowed from surrounding circumstances; he has not yet risen above himself, or transcended his limited sphere; his vision has not yet penetrated into those ideal regions in which his imagination will one day roam at will. But Shakspeare is already a poet; imitation no longer trammels his progress; and his conceptions are no longer formed exclusively within the world of his habits. How was it that the frivolous spirit of comedy was his first guide in that poetic world from which he drew his inspiration? Why did not the emotions of tragedy first awaken

the powers of so eminently tragic a poet? Was it this circumstance which led Johnson to give this singular opinion: "Shakspeare's tragedy seems to be skill; his comedy to be instinct?"

Assuredly, nothing can be more whimsical than to refuse to Shakspeare the instinct of tragedy; and if Johnson had had any feeling of it himself, such an idea would never have entered his mind. The fact which I have just stated, however, is not open to doubt; it is well deserving of explanation, and has its causes in the very nature of comedy, as it was understood and treated by Shakspeare.

Shakspeare's comedy is not, in fact, the comedy of Molière; nor is it that of Aristophanes, or of the Latin poets. Among the Greeks, and in France, in modern times, comedy was the offspring of a free but attentive observation of the real world, and its object was to bring its features on the stage. The distinction between the tragic and the comic styles is met with almost in the cradle of dramatic art, and their separation has always become more distinctly marked during the course of their progress. The principle of this distinction is contained in the very nature of things. The destiny and nature of man, his passions and affairs, characters and events—all things within and around us—have their serious and their amusing sides, and may be considered and described under either of these points of view. This two-fold aspect of man and the world has opened to dramatic poetry two careers naturally distinct; but in dividing its powers to traverse them both, art has neither separated itself from realities, nor ceased to observe and reproduce them. Whether Aristophanes attacks, with the most fantastic liberty of imagination, the vices or follies of the Athenians; or whether Molière depicts the absurdities of credulity and avarice, of jealousy

and pedantry, and ridicules the frivolity of courts, the vanity of citizens, and even the affectation of virtues, it matters little that there is a difference between the subjects in the delineation of which the two poets have employed their powers; it matters little that one brought public life and the whole nation on the stage, while the other merely described incidents of private life, the interior arrangements of families, and the nonsensicality of individual characters; this difference in the materials of comedy arises from the difference of time, place, and state of civilization. But in both Aristophanes and Molière realities always constitute the substance of the picture. The manners and ideas of their times, the vices and follies of their fellow-citizens—in a word, the nature and life of man—are always the stimulus and nutriment of their poetic vein. Comedy thus takes its origin in the world which surrounds the poet, and is connected, much more closely than tragedy, with external and real facts.

The Greeks, whose mind and civilization followed so regular a course in their development, did not combine the two kinds of composition, and the distinction which separates them in nature was maintained without effort in art. Simplicity prevailed among this people; society was not abandoned by them to a state of conflict and incoherence; and their destiny did not pass away in protracted obscurity, in the midst of contrasts, and a prey to dark and deep uneasiness. They grew and shone in their land just as the sun rose and pursued its course through the skies which overshadowed them. National perils, intestine discord, and civil wars agitated the life of a man in those days, without disturbing his imagination, and without opposing or deranging the natural and easy course of his thoughts. The reflex influence of this general harmony

was diffused over literature and the arts. Styles of composition spontaneously became distinguished from each other, according to the principles upon which they depended and the impressions which they aspired to produce. The sculptor chiseled isolated statues or innumeros groups, and did not aim at composing violent scenes or vast pictures out of blocks of marble. *Æschylus*, *Sophocles*, and *Euripides* undertook to excite the people by the narration of the mighty destinies of heroes and of kings. *Cratinus* and *Aristophanes* aimed at diverting them by the representation of the absurdities of their contemporaries or of their own follies. These natural classifications corresponded with the entire system of social order, with the state of the minds of the age, and with the instincts of public taste—which would have been shocked at their violation, which desired to yield itself without uncertainty or participation to a single impression or a single pleasure, and which would have rejected all those unnatural mixtures and uncongenial combinations to which their attention had never been called or their judgment accustomed. Thus every art and every style received its free and isolated development within the limits of its proper mission. Thus tragedy and comedy shared man and the world between them, each taking a different domain in the region of realities, and coming by turns to offer to the serious or mirthful consideration of a people who invariably insisted upon simplicity and harmony, the poetic effects which their skill could derive from the materials placed in their hands.

In our modern world, all things have borne another character. Order, regularity, natural and easy development, seem to have been banished from it. Immense interests, admirable ideas, sublime sentiments, have been

thrown, as it were, pell-mell with brutal passions, coarse necessities, and vulgar habits. Obscurity, agitation, and disturbance have reigned in minds as well as in states. Nations have been formed, not of freemen and slaves, but of a confused mixture of diverse, complicated classes, ever engaged in conflict and labor; a violent chaos, which civilization, after long-continued efforts, has not yet succeeded in reducing to complete harmony. Social conditions, separated by power, but united in a common barbarism of manners; the germ of loftiest moral truths fermenting in the midst of absurd ignorance; great virtues applied in opposition to all reason; shameful vices maintained and defended with hauteur; an indocile honor, ignorant of the simplest delicacies of honesty; boundless servility, accompanied by measureless pride; in fine, the incoherent assemblage of all that human nature and destiny contain of that which is great and little, noble and trivial, serious and puerile, strong and wretched—this is what man and society have been in our Europe; this is the spectacle which has appeared on the theatre of the world.

In such a state of mind and things, how was it possible for a clear distinction and simple classification of styles and arts to be effected? How could tragedy and comedy have presented and formed themselves isolatedly in literature, when, in reality, they were incessantly in contact, entwined in the same facts, and intermingled in the same actions, so thoroughly, that it was sometimes difficult to discern the moment of passage from one to the other. Neither the rational principle, nor the delicate feeling which separate them, could attain any development in minds which were incapacitated from apprehending them by the disorder and rapidity of different or opposite impressions. Was it proposed to bring upon the stage the

habitual occurrences of ordinary life? Taste was as easily satisfied as manners. Those religious performances which were the origin of the European theatre, had not escaped this admixture. Christianity is a popular religion; into the abyss of terrestrial miseries, its divine founder came in search of men, to draw them to himself; its early history is a history of poor, sick, and feeble men; it existed at first for a long while in obscurity, and afterward in the midst of persecutions, despised and proscribed by turns, and exposed to all the vicissitudes and efforts of a humble and violent destiny. Uncultivated imaginations easily seized upon the triviality which might be intermingled with the incidents of this history; the Gospel, the acts of martyrs, and the lives of saints, would have struck them much less powerfully if they had seen only their tragic aspect or their rational truths. The first Mysteries brought simultaneously upon the stage the emotions of religious terror and tenderness, and the buffooneries of vulgar comicality; and thus, in the very cradle of dramatic poetry, tragedy and comedy contracted that alliance which was inevitably forced upon them by the general condition of nations and of minds.

In France, however, this alliance was speedily broken off. From causes which are connected with the entire history of our civilization, the French people have always taken extreme pleasure in drollery. Of this, our literature has from time to time given evidence. This craving for gayety, and for gayety without alloy, early supplied the inferior classes of our countrymen with their comic farces, into which nothing was admitted that had not a tendency to excite laughter. In the infancy of the art, comedy in France may very possibly have invaded the domain of tragedy, but tragedy had no right to the field which com-

edy had reserved to itself; and in the *piteous* Moralities and *pompous* Tragedies which princes caused to be represented in their palaces, and rectors in their colleges, the trivially comic element long retained a place which was inexorably refused to the tragic element in the buffooneries with which the people were amused. We may therefore affirm that in France comedy, in an imperfect but distinct form, was created before tragedy. At a later period, the rigorous separation of classes, the absence of popular institutions, the regular action of the supreme power, the establishment of a more exact and uniform system of public order than existed in any other country, the habits and influence of the court, and a variety of other causes, disposed the popular mind to maintain that strict distinction between the two styles which was ordained by the classical authorities, who held undisputed sway over our drama. Then arose among us true and great comedy, as conceived by Molière; and as it was in accordance with our manners, as well as with the rules of the art, to strike out a new path—as, while adapting itself to the precepts of antiquity, it did not fail to derive its subjects and coloring from the facts and personages of the surrounding world, our comedy suddenly rose to a pitch of perfection which, in my opinion, has never been attained by any other country in any other age. To place himself in the interior of families, and thereby to gain the immense advantage of a variety of ideas and conditions, which extends the domain of art without injuring the simplicity of the effects which it produces; to find in man passions sufficiently strong, and caprices sufficiently powerful to sway his whole destiny, and yet to limit their influence to the suggestion of those errors which may make man ridiculous, without ever touching upon those which would ren-

der him miserable ; to describe an individual as laboring under that excess of preoccupation which, diverting him from all other thoughts, abandons him entirely to the guidance of the idea which possesses him, and yet to throw in his way only those interests which are sufficiently frivolous to enable him to compromise them without danger ; to depict, in "Tartuffe," the threatening knavery of the hypocrite, and the dangerous imbecility of the dupe, in such a manner as merely to divert the spectator, without incurring any of the odious consequences of such a position ; to give a comic character, in the "Misanthrope," to those feelings which do most honor to the human race, by condemning them to confinement within the dimensions of the existence of a courtier ; and thus to reach the amusing by means of the serious ; to extract food for mirth from the inmost recesses of human nature, and incessantly to maintain the character of comedy while bordering upon the confines of tragedy—this is what Molière has done, this is the difficult and original style which he bestowed upon France ; and France alone, in my opinion, could have given dramatic art this tendency, and Molière.

Nothing of this kind took place among the English. The asylum of German manners, as well as of German liberties, England pursued, without obstacle, the irregular, but natural course of the civilization which such elements could not fail to engender. It retained their disorder as well as their energy, and, until the middle of the seventeenth century, its literature, as well as its institutions, was the sincere expression of these qualities. When the English drama attempted to reproduce the poetic image of the world, tragedy and comedy were not separated. The predominance of the popular taste sometimes carried tragic representations to a pitch of atrocity which was un-

known in France, even in the rudest essays of dramatic art ; and the influence of the clergy, by purging the comic stage of that excessive immorality which it exhibited elsewhere, also deprived it of that malicious and sustained gayety which constitutes the essence of true comedy. The habits of mind which were entertained among the people by the minstrels and their ballads, allowed the introduction, even into those compositions which were most exclusively devoted to mirthfulness, of some touches of those emotions which comedy in France can never admit without losing its name, and becoming melodrama. Among truly national works, the only thoroughly comic play which the English stage possessed before the time of Shakspeare, " Gammer Gurton's Needle," was composed for a college, and modeled in accordance with the classic rules. The vague titles given to dramatic works, such as *play*, *interlude*, *history*, or even *ballad*, scarcely ever indicate any distinction of style. Thus, between that which was called *tragedy* and that which was sometimes named *comedy*, the only essential difference consisted in the *dénouement*, according to the principles laid down in the fifteenth century by the monk Lydgate, who "defines a comedy to begin with complaint and to end with gladness, whereas tragedy begins in prosperity and ends in adversity."

Thus, at the advent of Shakspeare, the nature and destiny of man, which constitute the materials of dramatic poetry, were not divided or classified into different branches of art. When art desired to introduce them on the stage, it accepted them in their entirety, with all the mixtures and contrasts which they present to observation ; nor was the public taste inclined to complain of this. The comic portion of human realities had a right to take its place

wherever its presence was demanded or permitted by truth; and such was the character of civilization, that tragedy, by admitting the comic element, did not derogate from truth in the slightest degree. In such a condition of the stage and of the public mind, what could be the state of comedy, properly so called? How could it be permitted to claim to bear a particular name, and to form a distinct style? It succeeded in this attempt by boldly leaving those realities in which its natural domain was neither respected nor acknowledged; it did not limit its efforts to the delineation of settled manners or of consistent characters; it did not propose to itself to represent men and things under a ridiculous but truthful aspect; but it became a fantastic and romantic work, the refuge of those amusing improbabilities which, in its idleness or folly, the imagination delights to connect together by a slight thread, in order to form from them combinations capable of affording diversion or interest, without calling for the judgment of the reason. Graceful pictures, surprises, the curiosity which attaches to the progress of an intrigue, mistakes, quid-pro-quos, all the witticisms of parody and travestie, formed the substance of this inconsequent diversion. The conformation of the Spanish plays, a taste for which was beginning to prevail in England, supplied these gambols of the imagination with abundant frame-works and alluring models. Next to their chronicles and ballads, collections of French or Italian tales, together with the romances of chivalry, formed the favorite reading of the people. Is it strange that so productive a mine and so easy a style should first have attracted the attention of Shakspeare? Can we feel astonished that his young and brilliant imagination hastened to wander at will among such subjects, free from the yoke of probabilities,

and excused from seeking after serious and vigorous combinations? The great poet, whose mind and hand proceeded, it is said, with such equal rapidity that his manuscript scarcely contained a single erasure, doubtless yielded with delight to those unrestrained gambols in which he could display without labor his rich and varied faculties. He could put any thing he pleased into his comedies, and he has, in fact, put every thing into them, with the exception of one thing which was incompatible with such a system, namely, the *ensemble* which, making every part concur toward the same end, reveals at every step the depth of the plan and the grandeur of the work. It would be difficult to find in Shakspeare's tragedies a single conception, position, act, or passion, or degree of vice or virtue, which may not also be met with in some one of his comedies; but that which in his tragedies is carefully thought out, fruitful in result, and intimately connected with the series of causes and effects, is in his comedies only just indicated, and offered to our sight for a moment to dazzle us with a passing gleam, and soon to disappear in a new combination. In "Measure for Measure," Angelo, the unworthy governor of Vienna, after having condemned Claudio to death for the crime of having seduced a young girl whom he intended to marry, himself attempts to seduce Isabella, the sister of Claudio, by promising her brother's pardon as a recompense for her own dishonor; and when, by Isabella's address in substituting another girl in her place, he thinks he has received the price of his infamous bargain, he gives orders to hasten Claudio's execution. Is not this tragedy? Such a fact might well be placed in the life of Richard the Third, and no crime of Macbeth's presents this excess of wickedness. But in "Macbeth" and "Richard

III.," crime produces the tragic effect which belongs to it, because it bears the impress of probability, and because real forms and colors attest its presence: we can discern the place which it occupies in the heart of which it has taken possession: we know how it gained admission, what it has conquered, and what remains for it to subjugate: we behold it incorporating itself by degrees into the unhappy being whom it has subdued: we see it living, walking, and breathing with a man who lives, walks, and breathes, and thus communicates to it his character, his own individuality. In Angelo, crime is only a vague abstraction, connected *en passant* with a proper name, with no other motive than the necessity of making that person commit a certain action which shall produce a certain position, from which the poet intends to derive certain effects. Angelo is not presented to us at the outset either as a rascal or as a hypocrite; on the contrary, he is a man of exaggeratedly severe virtue. But the progress of the poem requires that he should become criminal, and criminal he becomes; when his crime is committed, he will repent of it as soon as the poet pleases, and will find himself able to resume without effort the natural course of his life, which had been interrupted only for a moment.

Thus, in Shakspeare's comedy, the whole of human life passes before the eyes of the spectator, reduced to a sort of phantasmagoria—a brilliant and uncertain reflection of the realities portrayed in his tragedy. Just when the truth seems on the point of allowing itself to be caught, the image grows pale, and vanishes; its part is played, and it disappears. In the "Winter's Tale," Leontes is as jealous, sanguinary, and unmerciful as Othello; but his jealousy, born suddenly, from a mere caprice, at the moment when it is necessary that the plot should thicken,

loses its fury and suspicion as suddenly, as soon as the action has reached the point at which it becomes requisite to change the situation. In "Cymbeline"—which, notwithstanding its title, ought to be numbered among the comedies, as the piece is conceived in entire accordance with the same system—Iachimo's conduct is just as knavish and perverse as that of Iago in "Othello;" but his character does not explain his conduct, or, to speak more correctly, he has no character; and, always ready to cast off the rascal's cloak, in which the poet has enveloped him, as soon as the plot reaches its term, and the confession of the secret, which he alone can reveal, becomes necessary to terminate the misunderstanding between Posthumus and Imogen, which he alone has caused, he does not even wait to be asked, but, by a spontaneous avowal, deserves to be included in that general amnesty which should form the conclusion of every comedy.

I might multiply these examples to infinity; they abound not only in Shakspeare's early comedies, but also in those which succeeded the composition of his best tragedies. In all, we should find characters as unstable as passions, and resolutions as changeful as characters. Do not expect to find probability, or consecutiveness, or profound study of man and society; the poet cares little for these things, and invites you to follow his example. To interest by the development of positions, to divert by variety of pictures, and to charm by the poetic richness of details—this is what he aims at; these are the pleasures which he offers. There is no interdependence, no concatenation of events and ideas; vices, virtues, inclinations, intentions, all become changed and transformed at every step. Even absurdity does not always continue to characterize the individual whom it distinguishes at the outset. In "Cym-

beline," the imbecile Cloton becomes almost proud and noble when opposing the independence of a British prince to the threats of a Roman ambassador; and in "Measure for Measure," Elbow the constable, whose nonsensicalities furnish the diversion of one scene, speaks almost like a man of sense when, in a subsequent scene, another person is appointed to enliven the dialogue. Thus negligent and truant is the flight of the poet through these capricious compositions! Thus fugitive are the light creations with which he has animated them!

But, then, what gracefulness and rapidity of movement, what variety of forms and effects, what brilliancy of wit, imagination, and poetry—all employed to make us forget the monotony of their romantic frame-work! Doubtless, this is not comedy as we conceive it, and as Molière wrote it; but who but Shakspeare could have diffused such treasures over so frivolous and fantastic a style of comedy? The legends and tales upon which his plays are founded have given birth, both before and after him, to thousands of dramatic works which are now plunged in well-merited oblivion. A king of Sicily, jealous, without knowing why, of a king of Bohemia, determines to put his wife to death, and to expose his daughter; this child, left to perish on the *shore* of Bohemia, but saved by a shepherd from her cruel fate, becomes, after sixteen years have elapsed, a marvelous beauty, and is beloved by the heir to the crown. After all the obstacles naturally opposed to their union, arrives the ordinary *dénouement* of explanations and recognitions. This story truly combines all the most common and least probable features of the romances, tales, and pastorals of the time. But Shakspeare takes it, and the absurd fable that opens the "Winter's Tale" becomes interesting by the brutal truthfulness

of the jealous transports of Leontes, the amiable character of little Mamillius, the patient virtue of Hermione, and the generous inflexibility of Paulina ; and, in the second part, the rural festival, with its gayety and joyous incidents, and, amid the rustic scene, the charming figure of Perdita, combining with the modesty of an humble shepherdess the moral elegance of the superior classes, assuredly present the most piquant and graceful picture that truth could furnish to poetry. What particular charm is there in the nuptials of Theseus and Hippolyta, and the hackneyed incident of two pairs of lovers rendered unhappy by one another ? It is only a worn-out combination, destitute alike of interest and truth. Yet Shakspeare has made of it his "Midsummer Night's Dream ;" and in the midst of the dull intrigue, he introduces Oberon with his elves and fairies, who live upon flowers, run upon the blades of grass, dance in the rays of the moon, play with the light of the morning, and fly away, "following darkness like a team," as soon as Aurora's first doubtful rays begin to glimmer in the sky. Their employments, pleasures, and tricks occupy the scene, participate in all its incidents, and entwine in the same action the mournful destinies of the four lovers and the grotesque performances of a troop of artisans ; and after having fled away at the approach of the sun, when Night once more enshrouds earth in her sombre mantle, they will resume possession of that fantastic world into which we have been transported by this amazing and brilliant extravaganza.

In truth, it would be acting very rigorously toward ourselves, and very ungratefully toward genius, to refuse to follow it somewhat blindly when it invites us to a scene of such attraction. Are originality, simplicity, gayety, and gracefulness so common that we shall treat them se-

verely because they are lavished on a slight foundation of but little value? Is it nothing to enjoy the divine charm of poetry amid the improbabilities, or, if you will, the absurdities of romance? Have we, then, lost the happy power of lending ourselves complacently to its caprices? and do we not possess sufficient vivacity of imagination and youthfulness of feeling to enjoy so delightful a pleasure under whatever form it may be offered to us?

Five only of Shakspeare's comedies, the "Tempest," the "Merry Wives of Windsor," "Timon of Athens," "Troilus and Cressida," and the "Merchant of Venice," have escaped, at least in part, from the influence of the romantic taste. Some will, perhaps, be surprised to find this merit ascribed to the "Tempest." Like the "Midsummer Night's Dream," the "Tempest" is peopled with sylphs and sprites, and every thing is done under the sway of fairy power. But after having laid the action in this unreal world, the poet conducts it without inconsistency, complication, or languor; none of the sentiments are forced, or ceaselessly interrupted; the characters are simple and well sustained; the supernatural power which disposes the events undertakes to supply all the necessities of the plot, and leaves the personages of the drama at liberty to show themselves in their natural character, and to swim at ease in that magical atmosphere by which they are surrounded, without at all injuring the truthfulness of their impressions or ideas. The style is fantastic and sprightly; but, when the supposition is once admitted, there is nothing in the work to shock the judgment and disturb the imagination by the incoherence of the effects produced.

In the system of intrigued comedy, the "Merry Wives of Windsor" may be said to be almost perfect in its composition; it presents a true picture of manners; the *dé-*

nouement is as piquant as it is well-prepared ; and it is assuredly one of the merriest works in the whole comic repertory. Shakspeare evidently aspired higher in "Timon of Athens." It is an attempt at that scientific style in which the ridiculous is made to flow from the serious, and which constitutes *la grande comédie*. The scenes in which Timon's friends excuse themselves, under various pretexts, from rendering him assistance, are wanting neither in truthfulness nor effect. But, then, Timon's misanthropy, as furious as his confidence had previously been extravagant—the equivocal character of Apemantus—the abruptness of the transitions, and the violence of the sentiments, form a picture more melancholy than true, which is scarcely softened down enough by the fidelity of the old steward. Though far inferior to "Timon," the drama of "Troilus and Cressida" is nevertheless skillfully conceived ; it is based upon the resolution taken by the Grecian chiefs to flatter the stupid pride of Ajax, and make him the hero of the army, in order to humble the haughty disdainfulness of Achilles, and to obtain from his jealousy that which he had refused to their prayers. But the idea is more comic than its execution, and neither the buffoneries of Thersites nor the truthfulness of the part played by Pandarus are sufficient to impart to the piece that mirthful physiognomy without which comedy is impossible.

These four works, which are less akin than his other comedies to the romantic system, also belong more completely to Shakspeare's invention. The "Merry Wives of Windsor" is an original creation ; no tale has been discovered from which Shakspeare could have borrowed the subject of the "Tempest ;" the composition of "Timon of Athens" is indebted in no respect to Plutarch's account of

that misanthrope ; and in "Troilus and Cressida" Shakspeare has copied Chaucer in a very few particulars.

The story of the "Merchant of Venice" is of an entirely romantic character, and was selected by Shakspeare, like the "Winter's Tale," "Much Ado about Nothing," "Measure for Measure," and other plays, merely that he might adorn it with the graceful brilliancy of his poetry. But one incident of the subject conducted Shakspeare to the confines of tragedy, and he suddenly became aware of his domain ; he entered into that real world in which the comic and the tragic are commingled, and, when depicted with equal truthfulness, concur, by their combination, to increase the power of the effect produced. What can be more striking, in this style of dramatic composition, than the part assigned to Shylock ? This son of a degraded race has all the vices and passions which are engendered by such a position ; his origin has made him what he is, sordid and malignant, fearful and pitiless ; he does not think of emancipating himself from the rigors of the law, but he is delighted at being able to invoke it for once, in all its severity, in order to appease the thirst for vengeance which devours him ; and when, in the judgment scene, after having made us tremble for the life of the virtuous Antonio, Shylock finds the exactitude of that law, in which he triumphed with such barbarity, turned unexpectedly against himself—when he feels himself overwhelmed at once by the danger and the ridicule of his position, two opposite feelings—mirth and emotion—arise almost simultaneously in the breast of the spectator. What a singular proof is this of the general disposition of Shakspeare's mind ! He has treated the whole of the romantic part of the drama without any intermixture of comedy, or even of gaiety ; and we can discern true comedy only when we meet with Shylock—that is, with tragedy.

It is utterly futile to attempt to base any classification of Shakspeare's works on the distinction between the comic and tragic elements; they can not possibly be divided into these two styles, but must be separated into the fantastic and the real, the romance and the world. The first class contains most of his comedies; the second comprehends all his tragedies—immense and living stages, upon which all things are represented, as it were, in their solid form, and in the place which they occupied in a stormy and complicated state of civilization. In these dramas, the comic element is introduced whenever its character of reality gives it the right of admission and the advantage of opportune appearance. Falstaff appears in the train of Henry V., and Doll Tear-Sheet in the train of Falstaff; the people surround the kings, and the soldiers crowd around their generals; all conditions of society, all the phases of human destiny appear by turns in juxtaposition, with the nature which properly belongs to them, and in the position which they naturally occupy. The tragic and comic elements sometimes combine in the same individual, and are developed in succession in the same character. The impetuous preoccupation of Hotspur is amusing when it prevents him from listening to any other voice than his own, and substitutes his sentiments and words in the place of the things which his friends are desirous to tell him, and which he is equally anxious to learn; but it becomes serious and fatal when it leads him to adopt, without due examination, a dangerous project which suddenly inspires him with the idea of glory. The perverse obstinacy which renders him so comical in his dealings with the boastful and vainglorious Glendower, will be the tragical cause of his ruin when, in contempt of all reason and advice, and unaided by any succor, he hastens to the

battle-field, upon which, ere long, left alone, he looks around and sees naught but death. Thus we find the entire world, the whole of human realities, reproduced by Shakspeare in tragedy, which, in his eyes, was the universal theatre of life and truth.

In the year 1595, at latest, "Romeo and Juliet" had appeared. This work was succeeded, almost without interruption, until 1599, by "Hamlet," "King John," "Richard II.," "Richard III.," the two parts of "Henry IV.," and "Henry V." From 1599 to 1605, the chronological order of Shakspeare's works contains none but comedies and the play of "Henry VIII." After 1605, tragedy regains the ascendant in "King Lear," "Macbeth," "Julius Cæsar," "Antony and Cleopatra," "Coriolanus," and "Othello." The first period, we perceive, belongs rather to historical plays; and the second to tragedy properly so called, the subjects of which, not being taken from the positive history of England, allowed the poet a wider field, and permitted the free manifestation of all the originality of his nature. Historical dramas, generally designated by the name of *Histories*, had enjoyed possession of popular favor for nearly twenty years. Shakspeare emancipated himself but slowly from the taste of his age; though always displaying more grandeur, and gaining greater approbation in proportion as he abandoned himself with greater freedom to the guidance of his own instinct—he was nevertheless always careful to accommodate his progress to the advancement of his audience in their appreciation of his art. It appears certain, from the dates of his plays, that he never composed a single tragedy until some other poet had, as it were, felt the pulse of the public on the same subject; just as though he were conscious that he possessed within himself a superiority

which, before it could be trusted to the taste of the multitude, required the exercise of a vulgar caution.

It can not be doubted that, between historical dramas and tragedies, properly so called, Shakspeare's genius inclined in preference toward the latter class. The general and unvarying opinion which has placed "Romeo and Juliet," "Hamlet," "King Lear," "Macbeth," and "Othello" at the head of his works, would suffice to prove this. Among his national dramas, "Richard III." is the only one which has attained the same rank, and this is an additional proof of the truth of my assertion; for it is the only work which Shakspeare was able to conduct, in the same manner as his tragedies, by the influence of a single character or idea. Herein resides the fundamental difference between the two kinds of dramatic works; in one class, events pursue their course, and the poet accompanies them; in the other, events group themselves around a man, and seem to serve only to bring him into bold relief. "Julius Cæsar" is a true tragedy, and yet the progress of the piece is framed in accordance with Plutarch's narrative, just as "King John," "Richard II.," and "Henry IV." are made to coincide with Holinshed's Chronicles; but in the first-named piece, Brutus imparts to the play the unity of a great individual character. In the same manner, the history of "Richard III." is entirely his own history, the work of his design and will; whereas, the history of the other kings with whom Shakspeare has peopled his dramas is only a part, and frequently the smallest part, of the picture of the events of their time.

This arises from the fact that events were not what chiefly occupied Shakspeare's mind; his special attention was bestowed upon the men who occasioned them. He establishes his domain, not in historical, but in dramatic

truth.] Give him a fact to represent upon the stage, and he will not inquire minutely into the circumstances which accompanied it, or into the various and multiplied causes which may have combined to produce it; his imagination will not require an exact picture of the time or place in which it occurred, or a complete acquaintance with the infinite combinations of which the mysterious web of destiny is composed. These constitute only the materials of the drama; and Shakspeare will not look to them to furnish it with vitality. He takes the fact as it is related to him; and, guided by this thread, he descends into the depths of the human soul. It is man that he wishes to resuscitate; it is man whom he interrogates regarding the secret of his impressions, inclinations, ideas, and volitions. He does not inquire, "What hast thou done?" but, "How art thou constituted? Whence originated the part thou hast taken in the events in which I find thee concerned? What wert thou seeking after? What couldst thou do? Who art thou? Let me know thee; and then I shall know in what respects thy history is important to me."

Thus we may explain that depth of natural truth which reveals itself, in Shakspeare's works, even to the least practiced eyes, and that somewhat frequent absence of local truth which he would have been able to delineate with equal excellence if he had studied it with equal assiduity. Hence, also, arises that difference of conception which is observable between his historical dramas and his tragedies. Composed in accordance with a plan more national than dramatic, written beforehand in some sort by events well known in all their details, and already in possession of the stage under determinate forms, most of his historical plays could not be subjected to that individual

unity which Shakspeare delighted to render dominant in his compositions, but which so rarely holds sway in the actual narratives of history. Every man has usually a very small share in the events in which he has taken part; and the brilliant position which rescues a name from oblivion has not always preserved the man who bore it from sinking into a nullity. Kings especially, who are forced to appear upon the stage of the world independently of their aptitude to perform their part upon it, frequently afford less assistance than embarrassment to the conduct of an historical action. Most of the princes whose reigns furnished Shakspeare with his national dramas, undoubtedly exercised some influence upon their own history; but none of them, with the exception of Richard III., wrought it out entirely for himself. Shakspeare would have sought in vain to discover, in their conduct and personal nature, that sole cause of events, that simple and pregnant truth, which was called for by the instinct of his genius. While, therefore, in his tragedies, a moral position, or a strongly conceived character, binds and confines the action in a powerful knot, from whence the facts as well as the sentiments of the drama issue to return thither again, his historical plays contain a multitude of incidents and scenes which are destined rather to fill up the action than to facilitate its progress. As events pass in succession before his view, Shakspeare stops them to catch some few details, which suffice to determine their character; and these details he derives, not from the lofty or general causes of the facts, but from their practical and familiar results. An historical event may originate in a very exalted source, but it always descends to a very low position; it matters little that its sources be concealed in the elevated summits of social order, it ever reaches its consum-

mation in the popular masses, producing among them a widely-diffused and manifest effect and feeling. At this point, Shakspeare seems to wait for events, and here he takes his stand to portray them. The intervention of the people, who bear so heavy a part of the weight of history, is assuredly legitimate, at least in historical representations. It was, moreover, necessary to Shakspeare. Those partial pictures of private or popular history, which lie far behind its great events, are brought by Shakspeare to the front of the stage, and placed in prominent relief; indeed, we feel that he relies upon them to impart to his work the form and coloring of reality. The invasion of France, the battle of Agincourt, the marriage of a daughter of France to a king of England, in whose favor the French monarch disinherits the dauphin, are not sufficient, in his opinion, to occupy the whole of the historical drama of "Henry V.;" so he summons to his aid the comic erudition of the brave Welshman, Fluellen, the conversations of the king with the soldiers, Pistol, Nym, and Bardolph, all the subaltern movement of an army, and even the joyous loves of Catharine and Henry. In the two parts of "Henry IV.," the comedy is more closely connected with the events, and yet it does not emanate from them. Even if Falstaff and his crew occupied less space, the principal facts would not be less determinate, and would not follow another course; but these facts have only supplied Shakspeare with the external conformation of the drama; the incidents of private life, the comic details, Hotspur and his wife, and Falstaff and his companions, give it life and animation.

In true tragedy, every circumstance assumes another character and another aspect; no incident is isolated, or alien to the very substance of the drama; no link is slight

or fortuitous. The events grouped around the principal personage present themselves to view with the importance which they derive from the impression that he receives of them ; to him they address themselves, and from him they proceed ; he is the beginning and the end, the instrument and the object of the decrees of God, who, in the world which He has created for man, wills that every thing should be done by the hands of man, and nothing according to his designs. God employs the human will to accomplish intentions which man never entertained, and allows him to proceed freely toward a goal which he has not selected. But though man is exposed to the influence of events, he does not fall into subjection to them ; if impotence be his condition, liberty is his nature ; the feelings, ideas, and wishes with which he is inspired by external objects emanate from himself alone ; in him resides an independent and spontaneous power which rejects and defies the empire to which his destiny is subjected. Thus was the world constituted, and thus has Shakspeare conceived tragedy. Give him an obscure and remote event ; let him be bound to conduct it toward a determinate result, through a series of incidents more or less known ; amid these facts he will place a passion or a character, and put all the threads of the action into the hands of the creature of his own origination. Events follow their course, and man enters upon his ; he employs his power to divert them from the direction which he does not wish them to pursue, to conquer them when they thwart him, and to elude them when they embarrass him ; he subjects them for a moment to his authority, to find them soon acting with greater hostility toward him in the new course which he has forced them to take ; and at last he succumbs entirely in the struggle in which his destiny and his life have gone to wreck.

The power of man in conflict with the power of fate—this is the spectacle which fascinated and inspired the dramatic genius of Shakspeare. Perceiving it for the first time in the catastrophe of "Romeo and Juliet," he felt his will suddenly terror-struck at the aspect of the vast disproportion which exists between the efforts of man and the inflexibility of destiny—between the immensity of our desires and the nullity of our means. In "Hamlet," the second of his tragedies, he reproduces this picture with a sort of shuddering dread. A feeling of duty has prescribed to Hamlet a terrible project; he does not think that any thing can permit him to evade it; and from the very outset, he sacrifices every thing to it—his love, his self-respect, his pleasures, and even the studies of his youth. He has now only one object in the world—to prove and punish the crime which had caused his father's death. That, in order to accomplish this design, he must break the heart of her he loves; that, during the course of the incidents which he originates in order to effect his purpose, a mistake renders him the murderer of the inoffensive Polonius; that he himself becomes an object of mirth and contempt—he cares not, does not even bestow a thought upon it; these are the natural results of his determination, and in this determination his whole existence is concentrated. But he is desirous to accomplish his plan with certainty; he wishes to feel assured that the blow will be legitimate, and that it will not fail to strike home. Henceforward accumulate in his path those doubts, difficulties, and obstacles which the course of things invariably sets in opposition to the man who aims at subjecting it to his will. By bestowing a less philosophical observation upon these impediments, Hamlet would surmount them more easily; but the hesitation and dread which they inspire form part of their power, and

Hamlet must undergo its entire influence. Nothing, however, can shake his resolution, nothing divert him from his purpose: he advances, slowly it is true, with his eyes constantly fixed upon his object; whether he originates an opportunity, or merely appropriates one already existing, every step is a progress, until he seems to border on the final term of his design. But time has had its career; Providence is at its limit; the events which Hamlet has prepared hasten onward without his co-operation; they are consummated by him, and to his own destruction; and he falls a victim to those decrees whose accomplishment he has insured, destined to show how little man can avail to effect, even in that which he most ardently desires.

Already more inured to the contemplation of human life, Richard III., at the commencement of his sanguinary career, contemplates, with steady gaze, that immense disproportion before which the thought of the courageous but inexperienced Hamlet had incessantly quailed. Richard merely promises himself greater pride and pleasure from the subjugation of this hostile power; and resolves to give the lie to fate, which appeared to have destined him to abasement and contempt. In fact, we behold him ruling, like a conqueror, the chances of his life; events spring from his hands bearing the impress of his will; just as his thought conceives them, his power accomplishes them; he completes what he has projected, raises his existence to a level with his ambition, and falls at the moment appointed by inflexible destiny, to render the punishment of his crimes more striking, by inflicting it in the midst of his successes. Macbeth, Othello, Coriolanus, all equally active and blind in the conduct of their destiny, bring down upon themselves, in the same manner, with all the force of a passionate will, the event which is fated to crush them.

Brutus dies in consequence of the death of Cæsar ; no one desired more than himself the blow which killed him ; no one resolved on his death by a freer choice of his reason ; he had not, like Hamlet, a ghost to dictate to him his duty ; in himself alone he found that severe law to which he sacrificed his repose, his affections, and his inclinations ; no one is more thoroughly master of himself ; and yet, like all the rest, he dies, powerless to resist fate. With him perishes the liberty which he aspired to save ; the hope of rendering his death useful does not even flash across his mind ; and yet Shakspeare does not make him exclaim, when dying, " O Virtue, thou art only an empty name !"

And why not ? Because above this terrible conflict of man against necessity soars his moral existence, independent and sovereign, free from all the perils of the combat. The mighty genius whose view had embraced the whole destiny of man could not have failed to recognize its sublime secret ; a sure instinct revealed to him this final explanation, without which all is darkness and uncertainty. Furnished, therefore, with the moral thread which never breaks in his hands, he proceeds with firm steps through the embarrassments of circumstances and the perplexities of varied feelings ; nothing can be simpler at bottom than Shakspeare's action ; nothing less complicated than the impression which it leaves upon our minds. Our interest is never divided, and still less does it waver between two opposite inclinations, or two equally powerful affections. As soon as the characters become known, and their position is developed, our choice is made ; we know what we desire and what we fear, whom we hate and whom we love. There is also as little conflict of duties as of interests ; and the conscience wavers no more than the affections. In the midst of political revo-

lutions, in times when society is at war with itself, and can no longer guide individuals by those laws which it has imposed upon them for the maintenance of its unity, then alone does Shakspeare's judgment hesitate, and allow ours to hesitate also; he can himself no longer accurately determine on which side lies the right, or what duty requires, and he is therefore unable to tell us. "King John," "Richard II.," and the three parts of "Henry VI.," furnish examples of this. In every other drama, the moral position is evident, free from ambiguity, and undisguised by complaisance; the characters are not represented as deceiving or deceived, hovering between vice and virtue, weakness and crime; what they are, they are frankly and openly; their actions are depicted in vigorous outlines, so that even the weakest eyesight can not mistake them. And yet—so admirable is his perception of truth!—in these actions, so positive, complete, and consistent, all the inconsistencies and fantastic mixtures of human nature exist and are displayed. Macbeth has fully made up his mind to crime; no link binds his conduct any longer to virtue; and yet who can doubt that, in the character of Macbeth, side by side with the passions which stimulate him to crime, there still exist those inclinations which constitute virtue? The mother of Hamlet has set no bounds to her incestuous love; she knows her crime and boldly commits it; her position is that of a shameless culprit; but her soul is that of a woman capable of loving modesty, and finding happiness within the bounds of duty. Even Claudius himself, the wretch Claudius, would wish to be able still to pray; he can not do so, but he wishes he could. Thus the keen vision of the philosopher enlightens and directs the imagination of the poet; thus man appears to Shakspeare only when fully furnished with

all that belongs to his nature. The truth is always there, before the eyes of the poet : he looks down and writes.

But there is one truth which Shakspeare does not observe in this manner, which he derives from himself, and without which all the external truths which he contemplates would be merely cold and sterile images ; and that is, the feeling which these truths excite within him. This feeling is the mysterious bond which unites us to the outer world, and makes us truly know it ; when our mind has taken realities into consideration, our soul is moved by an analogous and spontaneous impression ; but for the anger with which we are inspired by the sight of crime, whence should we obtain the revelation of that element which renders crime odious ? No one has ever combined, in an equal degree with Shakspeare, this double character of an impartial observer and a man of profound sensibility. Superior to all by his reason, and accessible to all by sympathy, he sees nothing without judging it, and he judges it because he feels it. Could any one who did not detest Iago have penetrated, as Shakspeare has done, into the recesses of his execrable character ? To the horror with which he regards the criminal must be ascribed the terrible energy of the language which he puts into his mouth. Who could make us tremble, so much as Lady Macbeth herself, at the action for which she prepares with so little fear ? But when it becomes needful to express pity or tenderness, the unrestraint of love, the extravagance of maternal apprehension, or the stern and deep grief of manly affection—then the observer may quit his post, and the judge his tribunal. Shakspeare himself develops all the abundance of his nature, and gives expression to those familiar feelings of his soul which are set in motion by the slightest contact with his imagination. Women,

children, old men—who has described them with such truthfulness as he? Where the ingenuousness of requited affection given birth to a purer flower than Desdemona? Has old age, when shamefully deserted, and driven to madness by the weakness of senility and the violence of grief, ever given utterance to more pathetic lamentations than in “King Lear?” Who has not felt his heart assailed by all the emotions of anguish which childhood can inspire, on beholding the scene in which Hubert, in performance of his promise to King John, is about to burn out the eyes of young Arthur? And if this barbarous project were carried into execution, who could endure it? But in such a case Shakspeare would not have described the scene. There is an excess of grief in presence of which he pauses; he takes pity on himself, and repels impressions too powerful to be borne. Scarcely does he permit Juliet to utter any words between Romeo’s death and her own; Macduff is silent after the massacre of his wife and children; and Constance dies before we are allowed to behold the death of Arthur. Othello alone approaches the whole of his sufferings without mitigation; but his misfortune was so horrible, when he was ignorant of it, that the impression which he receives from it, after the discovery of his error, becomes almost a consolation.

Thus moved by all that moves us, Shakspeare obtains our confidence; we yield ourselves in security to that open soul in which our feelings have already reverberated, and to that ready imagination which is as much illumined by the splendid sun of Italy as darkened by the sombre fogs of Denmark. Dramatic in the portraiture of a mother’s gambols with her child, and simple in the terrible apparition which opens the first scene of “Hamlet,” the poet is never unequal to the realities which he has to delineate,



or the man to the emotions with which he wishes to imbue our hearts.

Why, then, are we sometimes painfully compelled to pause while following him? Why does a sort of impatience and fatigue frequently disturb the admiration which we feel for his works? One misfortune happened to Shakspeare; though he was always lavish of his wealth, he was not always able to distribute it either opportunely or skillfully. This was frequently the misfortune of Corneille also. Ideas accumulated about Corneille, as about Shakspeare, confusedly and tumultuously, and neither of them had the courage to treat his own mind with prudent severity. They forgot the position of the character they were describing, in order to indulge in the thoughts which it awakened in the soul of the poet. In Shakspeare, especially, this excessive indulgence in his own ideas and feelings sometimes arrests and interrupts the emotions awakened in the breast of the spectator, in a manner which is fatal to the dramatic effect. It is not merely, as in Corneille, the ingenious loquacity of a rather talkative mind; but it is the restless and fantastic reverie of a mind astonished at its own discoveries, not knowing how to reproduce the whole impression which it has received from them, and heaping ideas, images, and expressions one upon another, in order to awaken in us feelings similar to those by which it is itself oppressed. The feelings developed at such length are not always, however, those which should properly occupy the personage by whom they are expressed; and not only is the harmony of the position injured by them, but we find ourselves compelled to undertake a certain labor which, in the end, diverts our attention from the subject on which it ought to be concentrated. Though always simple in their emotions, the heroes of Shakspeare

are not always equally simple in their speeches ; though always true and natural in their ideas, they are not as constantly true and natural in the combinations which they form from them. The poet's gaze embraced an immense field, and his imagination, "traversing it with marvelous rapidity, perceived a thousand distant or singular relations between the objects which met his view, and passed from one to another by a multitude of abrupt and curious transitions, which it afterward imposed upon both the personages of the drama and the spectators. Hence arose the true and great fault of Shakspeare, the only one that originated in himself, and which is sometimes perceptible even in his finest compositions ; and that is, a deceptive appearance of laborious research, which is occasioned, on the contrary, by the absence of labor. Accustomed, by the taste of his age, frequently to connect ideas and expressions by their most distant relations, he contracted the habit of that learned subtlety which perceives and assimilates every thing, and leaves no point of resemblance unnoticed ; and this fault has more than once marred the gayety of his comedies, as well as destroyed the pathos of his tragedies. If meditation had taught Shakspeare to fall back upon himself, to contemplate his own strength, and to concentrate it by skillful management, he would soon have rejected the abuse which he has made of it, and would have speedily become conscious that neither his heroes nor his spectators could follow him in that prodigious movement of ideas, feelings, and intentions which, on every occasion, and under the slightest pretext, arose and obtruded themselves upon his own thought.

But so far as we are able, at the present day, to form any idea of Shakspeare's character, from the scattered and uncertain details which have reached us regarding his life

and person, we have every reason to believe that he never bestowed so much care either on his labors or on his glory. More disposed to enjoy his own powers than to turn them to their best account—docile to the inspiration, rather than guided by the consciousness of his genius—vexed but little by a craving after success, and more inclined to doubt its value than attentive to the means of obtaining it—the poet advanced without measuring his progress, unvailing himself, as it were, at every step, and perhaps retaining, even at the end of his career, some remains of ingenuous ignorance of the marvelous riches which he scattered so lavishly in every direction. His sonnets alone, of all his works, contain a few allusions to his personal feelings, and to the condition of his soul and life; but we rarely meet in them with the idea, so natural to a poet, of the immortality which his works are destined to achieve. He could not have been a man who reckoned much upon posterity, or who cared at all about it, who ever displayed so little anxiety to throw light upon the only monuments of his private existence which posterity possesses concerning him.

Printed for the first time in 1609, these sonnets were, doubtless, published with Shakspeare's consent, although nothing seems to indicate that he took the slightest part in their publication. Neither his publisher nor himself has endeavored to impart to them an historical interest by naming the persons to whom they were addressed, or the occasions which inspired their composition. Thus the light which they throw upon some of the circumstances of his life is often so doubtful that it tends rather to perplex than to guide the biographer. The passionate style which pervades them all—even those which are evidently addressed merely to a friend—has thrown the commentators upon Shakspeare into great embarrassment. Of all the conjeo-

tures which have been hazarded in explanation of this fact, one alone, in my opinion, seems to possess any likelihood. At a time when the mind, tormented, as it were, by its youth and inexperience, tried all forms of expression, except simplicity—and at a court in which *euphuism*, the fashionable language, had introduced the most whimsical travesties, both of persons and ideas, into familiar conversation—it is possible that, in order to express real feelings, the poet may sometimes have assumed, in these fugitive compositions, the tone and language of conventionality. It is known, from a pamphlet published in 1598, that Shakspeare's "sugar'd sonnets," which were already celebrated, although they had not yet been printed, were the delight of his private circle of friends; and if it be remarked that the idea which terminates them is almost always repeated, with variations, in several successive sonnets, we shall feel strongly tempted to regard them as the simple amusements of a mind which could never resist the opportunity of expressing an ingenious idea. Not only, therefore, are Shakspeare's sonnets insufficient to explain the facts to which they allude, but it is only by a more or less logical process of induction that they can be made to supply any details regarding the occupations of Shakspeare's life during his residence in London, and during those thirty years, now so glorious, regarding which he has been at such pains to supply us with no information.

Perhaps his position, as well as his character, may have contributed to cause this silence. A feeling of pride, as much as a sentiment of modesty, may have induced Shakspeare to leave in oblivion an existence which gave him but little satisfaction. The condition of an actor then possessed, in England, neither consistency nor reputation. Whatever difference Hamlet may place between strolling play-

ers and those who belonged to an established theatre, the latter could not but bear the weight of the coarseness of the public upon whom they were dependent, as well as that of the colleagues with whom they shared the task of diverting the public. The general fondness for theatrical amusements furnished employment to persons of every condition, from those who engaged in bear-baitings, to the choristers of St. Paul's and the players of Blackfriars. It was probably of some theatre holding a middle rank between these two extremes that Shakspeare gives us so amusing a description in the "Midsummer Night's Dream." But the means of illusion to which the artisan performers of this drama have recourse, are in no respect inferior to those of which the most distinguished theatres made use. The actor, covered "with lime and rough-cast," who represents the wall that separated Pyramus and Thisbe, and moves his fingers to provide "the chink through which the lovers whisper," and the man who, with his lantern, his dog, and his thorn-bush, "doth the horned moon present," did not require a much greater stretch of the imagination of the spectators than was necessary to regard the same scene as a garden full of flowers; then, without any changes, as a rock upon which a vessel has just suffered shipwreck; and, finally, as a field of battle, upon which "two armies fly in, represented with four swords and bucklers."* There is reason to believe that all these performances collected together very nearly the same audience; at least, it is certain that Shakspeare's plays were performed both at Blackfriars and at the Globe, two different theatres, although both belonged to the same troop.

Strolling players were accustomed to give their per-

* See the ironical description of the uncouth state of the stage, given by Sir Philip Sidney in his "Defense of Poesy."

formances in the court-yards of inns. The stage was erected in one corner, while the spectators occupied the remainder of the yard, standing, like the actors, in the open air; the lower rooms and the gallery which ran round the court, were doubtless opened to the public at a higher rate of admission. The London theatres were constructed upon this plan; and those which were called "public play-houses," in opposition to the "private theatres," kept up the custom of performing in the open air, without any other canopy than the sky. The Globe was a public theatre, and the Blackfriars a private one; these last establishments doubtless occupied a superior rank; and, at a later period, to frequent the Blackfriars theatre was regarded as a mark of elegant taste and superior discernment. But such distinctions are incapable of being clearly defined, and when Shakspeare appeared on the stage these shades of difference were probably very confused. In 1609, Decker wrote a pamphlet entitled "The Gul's Horne-booke," which contains a chapter, "How a gallant should behave himself in a play-house." We learn from this authority that a gentleman, on entering a public or private theatre, should walk at once on the stage, and sit down either on the ground or on a stool, as he found it convenient to pay for a seat or not. He must valiantly keep his post, in spite of the gibes and insults of the populace in the pit; because it becomes a gentleman to laugh at "the mows and hisses of the opposed rascality." However, if the multitude should begin to shout "Out with the fool!" the danger becomes sufficiently serious for good taste to permit the gentleman to withdraw. During the performance, the common people were supplied with beer and apples, of which the actors also frequently partook; while the gentlemen, on their side, smoked their pipes and

played at cards ; indeed, it was not at all unusual for the elegant *habitués* of the theatre to begin a game at cards before the commencement of the play. "The Gul's Horne-booke" recommends them to play with an appearance of great eagerness, even if they return the money to each other at supper-time ; and nothing, says Decker, can give greater notoriety to a gentleman than to throw his cards on the stage, after having torn up three or four of them with every manifestation of rage. The duties of the spectators in possession of the honors of the stage were to speak, to laugh, and to turn their backs on the actors whenever they were displeased with either the author or the play. These pleasures of the gentlemen give a sufficient clue to those of the populace in the pit, whom contemporary writers usually designate by the name of "stinkards." The condition of the actors compelled to minister to the amusement of such an audience could not but be attended by more than one unpleasantness, and we may attribute to Shakspeare's experience of an actor's life that aversion for popular assemblies which is frequently displayed with great energy in his works.

Nor do the condition and habits of the poets who wrote for the stage give us a more honorable idea, in these two respects, of the actors with whom they associated ; and, in order to suppose that Shakspeare, young, gay, and easy-tempered, could have escaped from the influence of his two-fold character of poet and actor, we need the assistance of that unshrinking faith which the commentators repose in their patron. Shakspeare himself leaves us little room to doubt that he fell into errors, which he at least has the merit of regretting. In one of his sonnets, he inquires why Fortune, whom he calls

"The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,"

should alone bear the reproach of the "public means" to which he has been obliged to resort for his subsistence And he adds :

"Thence comes it that my name receives a brand;
And almost thence my nature is subdued
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand.
Pity me, then, and wish I were renewed,
While, like a willing patient, I will drink
Potions of eyesel* 'gainst my strong infection;
No bitterness that I will bitter think,
Nor double penance to correct correction."

In the next sonnet, addressing the same person, still in the same tone of confident yet respectful affection, he says :

"Your love and pity doth th' impression fill
Which vulgar scandal stamped upon my brow;
For what care I who calls me well or ill,
So you o'er-green my bad, my good allow?"

In another sonnet, he laments over the blot which had divided two lives united by affection, and says :

"I may not evermore acknowledge thee,
Lest my bewailed guilt should do thee shame;
Nor thou with public kindness honor me,
Unless thou take that honor from my name."

And in another sonnet, he complains that he is, if not calumniated, at least wrongly judged; and that the "frailties of his sportive blood" are spied out by censors, who are frailer than himself. It is easy to divine the nature of Shakspeare's frailties; and several sonnets on the infidelities, and even on the vices, of the mistress whom he celebrates, give sufficient proof that his errors were not always caused by persons capable of excusing them. However, how can we suppose that, in the state of morals in

* Vinegar.

the sixteenth century, public severity could have looked with great rigor on such disorders? In order to explain the humiliation of the poet, we must suppose either that he had been guilty of some extraordinarily scandalous conduct, or that particular dishonor attached to the disorders and position of an actor. The latter hypothesis appears to me the most probable. No grave reproach can, at any time, have weighed upon a man whose contemporaries never speak of him without affection and esteem, and whom Ben Jonson declares to have been "truly honest," without deriving from this assertion either the opportunity or the right of relating some circumstance disgraceful to his memory, or some well-known error which the officious rival would not have failed to establish while excusing it.

Perhaps, on being brought into contact with the higher classes of society, struck by the display of a relative elegance of sentiments and manners of which he had previously had no idea, and becoming suddenly aware that his nature gave him a right to participate in these delicacies which had hitherto been foreign to his habits, Shakspeare felt himself oppressed, by his position, with painful shackles; perhaps even he was led to exaggerate his humiliation, by the natural disposition of a haughty soul, which feels itself all the more abased by an unequal condition, because it is conscious of its worthiness to enjoy equality. At all events, there can be no doubt that, with that measured circumspection which is as frequently the accompaniment of pride as of modesty, Shakspeare labored to overleap these humiliating differences of station, and succeeded in his attempt. His first dedication to Lord Southampton, that of "Venus and Adonis," is written with respectful timidity. That of the poem of "Lu-

orece," which was published in the following year, expresses grateful attachment, which feels sure of being well received; and he vows to his protector "love without end." The resemblance of the tone of this preface to that of a great many of the sonnets, the repeated benefits in which the friendship of Lord Southampton enabled their recipient to glory, and the lively affection with which the sensitive and confident Shakspeare was naturally inspired by the amiable and generous protection of a young man of such brilliant rank and merit—all these circumstances have led some of the commentators to suppose that Lord Southampton may have been the object of the poet's inexplicable sonnets. Without inquiring to what extent the *cuphuism* then prevalent, the exaggeration of poetic language, and the false taste of the age, may have imparted to Lord Southampton the features of an adored mistress, we can not but admit that most of these sonnets are addressed to a person of superior rank, the devotion of the poet to whom bears the character of submissive but passionate respect. Several of them, also, seem to point to habitual and intimate literary connections. Sometimes Shakspeare congratulates himself on possessing the guidance and inspiration of his friend; and sometimes he complains that he has ceased to be the sole recipient of that inspiration, and says,

"I grant thou wert not married to my Muse;"

but yet the grief occasioned by this divided favor is expressed under all the forms of jealousy, sometimes resigned to its fate, and sometimes stimulated, by the bitterness of its feelings, to give utterance to strong reproaches, which, however, never transgress the bounds of respect. Nowhere he accuses himself, as it would appear, of in-

fidelity to "an old friend;" he has too "frequent been with unknown minds;" and "given to time" the "dear-purchased rights" of an affection

"Whereto all bonds do tie me day by day;"

but he confesses his fault, and implores pardon in the name of the confidence with which he is always inspired by the affection he has neglected. Another sonnet speaks of mutual wrongs pardoned, but the sorrow of which is still present. If these are not mere forms of language, employed, perhaps, on occasions very different from those which they appear to indicate, the feeling which thus occupied the inner life of the poet must have been as tempestuous as it was passionate.

Externally, however, his existence seems to have pursued a tranquil course. His name is mixed up in no literary quarrel; and, but for the malicious allusions of the envious Ben Jonson, scarcely would a single criticism be associated with the panegyrics which bear witness to his superiority. All the documents which we possess exhibit Shakspeare to us placed at last in the position which he was rightfully entitled to occupy, and valued as much for the charm of his character as for the brilliancy of his talents, and the admiration due to his genius. A glance, too, at the affairs of the poet will prove that he was beginning to introduce into the details of his existence that order and regularity which are essential to respectability. We find him successively purchasing, in his native town, a house and various portions of land, which soon formed a sufficient estate to insure him a competent income. The profits which he derived from the theatre, in his double capacity of author and actor, have been estimated at two hundred pounds a year, a very considerable sum at that

time; and if the liberalities of Lord Southampton were added to the economy of the poet, we may conclude that, at least, they were not unwisely employed. Rowe, in his *Life of Shakspeare*, seems to think that the gifts of Queen Elizabeth also had some share in building up the fortune of her favorite poet. The grant of an escutcheon which was made, or rather confirmed to his father in 1599, proves a desire to bestow honor on his family. But there is nothing to indicate that Shakspeare obtained from Elizabeth and her court any marks of distinction superior, or even equal to those conferred by Louis XIV. upon Molière, like himself an actor and a poet. If we except his intimacy with Lord Southampton, Shakspeare, like Molière, chose his habitual acquaintance chiefly among men of letters, whose social condition he had probably contributed to elevate. The Mermaid Club, founded by Sir Walter Raleigh, and of which Shakspeare, Ben Jonson, Beaumont, Fletcher, and many others were members, was long celebrated for the brilliant "*wit-combats*," which took place there between Shakspeare and Ben Jonson, and in which the vivacity of the former gave him an immense advantage over the laborious slowness of his opponent. The anecdotes which are quoted on this point are not worthy of being collected at the present day. Few *bons-mots* are sufficiently good to survive for two centuries.

Who would not suppose that a life which had become so honorable and pleasant would long have retained Shakspeare in the midst of society conformable to the necessities of his mind, and upon the theatre of his glory? Nevertheless, in 1613, or 1614 at the latest, three or four years after having obtained from James I. the direction of the Blackfriars Theatre, without having apparently in-

curred the displeasure of the king to whom he was indebted for this new mark of favor, or of the public for whom he had just produced "Othello" and "The Tempest," Shakspeare left London and the stage to take up his residence at Stratford, in his house at New Place, in the midst of his fields. Had he become anxious to taste the joys of family life? He might have brought his wife and children to London. Nothing seems to indicate that he was greatly grieved at separation from them. During his residence in London, he used, it is said, to make frequent journeys to Stratford; but he has been accused of having found, on the road, pleasures of a kind which may have consoled him, at least, for the absence of his wife; and Sir William Davenant used loudly to boast of the poet's intimacy with his mother, the pretty and witty hostess of the Crown, at Oxford, where Shakspeare always stopped on his way to Stratford. If Shakspeare's sonnets were to be regarded as the expression of his dearest and most habitual feelings, we might reasonably be astonished at not finding in them a single allusion to his native place, to his children, or even to the son whom he lost at twelve years of age. And yet Shakspeare could not have been ignorant of the power of paternal love. He who, in "Macbeth," has described pity as "a naked, new-born babe;" he who has put these words into the mouth of Coriolanus,

"Not of a woman's tenderness to be,
Requires nor child nor woman's face to see;"

he who has so well depicted the tender puerilities of maternal affection, could not have looked upon his own children without experiencing the fond emotions of a father's heart. But Shakspeare, as his character presents itself to our mind, had long been able to find, in the distractions

of the world, enough to occupy the place, in his soul and life, which he was capable of giving up to family affections. However this may be, it is more difficult to discern the causes which led to his departure from London, than to perceive those which might have tended to prolong his residence in that city. Perhaps the arrival of infirmities may have warned him of the necessity of repose ; and perhaps, also, the very natural desire of showing himself in his native place, under circumstances so different from those in which he had left it, made him hasten the moment of renouncing labors which no longer had the pleasures of youth for their compensation.

New pleasures could not fail to spring up for Shakspeare in his retirement. A natural disposition to enjoy every thing heartily rendered him equally adapted to delight in the calm happiness of a tranquil life, and to find enjoyment in the vicissitudes of an agitated existence. The first mulberry-tree introduced into the neighborhood of Stratford was planted by Shakspeare's hands, in a corner of his garden at New Place, and attested for more than a century the gentle simplicity of the occupations in which his days were spent. A competent fortune seemed to unite with the esteem and friendship of his neighbors to promise him that best crown of a brilliant life, a tranquil and honored old age, when, on the 23d of April, 1616, the very day on which he attained his fifty-second year, death carried him off from that calm and pleasant position, the happy leisure of which he would doubtless not have consecrated to repose alone.

We have no information regarding the nature of the disease to which he fell a victim. His will is dated on the 25th of March, 1616 ; but the date of February, effaced to make way for that of March, gives us reason to believe

that he had commenced it a month previously. He declares that he had written it in perfect health ; but the precaution taken thus opportunely, at an age still so distant from senility, leads to the presumption that some unpleasant symptom had awakened within him the idea of danger. There is no evidence either to confirm or to set aside this supposition ; and Shakspeare's last days are surrounded by an obscurity even deeper, if possible, than that which enshrouds his life.

His will contains nothing very remarkable, with the exception of a new proof of the little estimation in which he held the wife whom he had so hastily married. After having appointed his daughter Susannah, who had married Mr. Hall, a physician at Stratford, his chief legatee, he bequeaths tokens of friendship to various persons, among whom he does not include his wife, but mentions her afterward, in an interlineation, merely to leave to her his "second best bed." A similar piece of forgetfulness, repaired in the same manner, is remarkable in reference to Burbage, Heminge, and Condell, the only ones of his theatrical friends of whom he makes mention ; to each of these he bequeaths, also in an interlineation, thirty-six shillings, "to buy them rings." Burbage, the best actor of his time, had contributed greatly to the success of Shakspeare's plays ; (Heminge and Condell, seven years after his death, published the first complete edition of his dramatic works.)

This singular omission of the name of Shakspeare's wife, repaired in so slight a manner, probably indicates something more than forgetfulness ; and we are tempted to regard it as the sign of an aversion or dislike, the manifestation of which the poet was induced to modify, in a slight degree, by the approach of death alone.

● Shakspeare's second daughter, Judith, had married a vintner, and received a much smaller share of her father's inheritance than her sister, Mrs. Hall. Was it in her quality of eldest daughter, or in consequence of some special predilection, that Shakspeare thus distinguished Susannah? An epitaph engraved upon her tomb, at her death in 1649, represents her as "witty above her sex," in which she had "something of Shakspeare," but more because she was "wise to salvation," and "wept for all." About Judith we know nothing, except that she could not write; which fact is established by a deed still existing, to which she has affixed a cross, or some analogous sign, indicated by a marginal note as "Judith Shakspeare, her mark." Judith left three sons, who died childless. Susannah had one daughter, who married, first, Thomas Nash, and afterward Sir John Barnard, of Abington. No child was born of either of these marriages, and thus Shakspeare's posterity became extinct in the second generation.

(It is somewhat remarkable that Shakspeare died on the same day as his great contemporary, Cervantes.)

Shakspeare was buried in Stratford church, in which his tomb still exists. It represents the poet of the size of life, sitting under an arch, with a cushion before him, and a pen in his right hand. Like many other monuments of the time, the figure was originally colored after the life; the eyes being painted light brown, with hair and beard of a deeper tinge. The doublet was scarlet, and the gown black. The colors having become faded by time, were restored, in 1748, by Mr. John Ward, the grandfather of Mrs. Siddons and of Kemble, out of the profits of a performance of "Othello." But in 1793, Mr. Malone, one of the principal commentators upon Shakspeare, covered the statue with a thick coat of white paint; being doubtless led to

do this by that exclusive prejudice in favor of modern customs which has so frequently led him into error in his commentaries. An indignant traveler, in some lines written in the Album of Stratford church, has called down the malediction of the poet upon Malone,

“Whose meddling zeal his barb'rous taste displays,
And smears his tombstone, as he marred his plays.”

Without giving an absolute assent to these harsh expressions of legitimate anger, we can not refrain from a smile at observing, in Mr. Malone's coat of white paint, a symbol of the spirit which dictated his commentaries, as well as a type of the general character of the eighteenth century, held in servitude by its own tastes, and incapable of comprehending any thing that did not enter into the sphere of its ordinary habits and ideas.

Although this injudicious reparation effected a great change in the physiognomy of the portrait of Shakspeare, it was not able altogether to efface that expression of gentle serenity which appears to have characterized the countenance as well as the soul of the poet. On the sepulchral stone below the monument, the following inscription is engraved :

“Good friend, for Jesus sake forbear
To dig the dust inclosed here.
Bless'd be the man that spares these stones,
And cursed be he that moves my bones.”

These lines are said to have been composed by Shakspeare himself, and were the cause which prevented the transference of his tomb to Westminster, as had once been intended. Some years ago, an excavation by the wall of Stratford church exposed to view the grave in which his body had been laid ; and the sexton, who, in order to prevent the sacrilegious depredations of curiosity or admiration, kept guard by the opening until the vault had been

repaired, having attempted to look inside the tomb, saw neither bones nor coffin, but only dust. "It seems to me," says the traveler who relates this circumstance, "that it was something to have seen the dust of Shakspeare."

This tomb now remains in sole possession of the honors which it once shared with Shakspeare's mulberry-tree. About the middle of last century, the Rev. Mr. Gastrell, a man of large fortune, became the proprietor of New Place. This house, which had remained for some time in the possession of the Nash family, had afterward passed through several hands, and undergone many alterations; but the mulberry-tree remained standing, the object of the veneration of the curious. Mr. Gastrell, annoyed at the number of visitors which it attracted, had it cut down, with a savage brutality in which indifference would probably not have indulged, but which frequently characterizes that furious pride of liberty and property which would deem itself compromised if it yielded in the slightest degree to public opinion. A few years afterward, this same Mr. Gastrell, in consequence of a dispute which he had had with the town of Stratford regarding a slight tax which he was required to pay on his house, swore that *that* house should never be taxed again, and he therefore had it pulled down, and sold the materials. As for the mulberry-tree, part of it was saved from the fire to which it had been consigned by Mr. Gastrell, by a clock-maker of Stratford, a man of sense, who gained a great deal of money by making it into snuff-boxes, toys, and other articles. The house in which Shakspeare was born still exists at Stratford, and is still shown as an object of interest to travelers, who may always see, and, it is said, are constantly able to purchase, either the chair or the sword of the poet, the lantern which he used in perform-

ing the part of Friar Lawrence in "Romeo and Juliet," or pieces of the arquebuse with which he killed the deer in Sir Thomas Lucy's park.

It is not from the death of Shakspeare that we must date, in England, that worship, the devotedness of which, after having been maintained with such fervor for sixty years, seems now to have diffused a reflection of its heat over several countries of Europe. Though Shakspeare was dead, Ben Jonson still lived; and though Beaumont had lost his friend Fletcher, he still possessed his talent, the effects of which had been weakened, rather than fortified, by Fletcher. The necessities of curiosity too often overcome those of taste; and the pleasure of going again to admire Shakspeare could not fail to yield to the keener interest of going to judge the newest productions of his competitors. It was not to his dramatic pedantry that Ben Jonson was then indebted for the empire which, in Shakspeare's lifetime, he did not venture to aspire to share. The triumphs of classical taste were confined, in his case, to the unanimous eulogies of the literary men of his time, who were easily satisfied on the score of regularity, and were always glad of an opportunity to avenge science upon the disdain of the vulgar; but the tragedies and comedies of Ben Jonson were not the less coolly received by the public, and were sometimes even rejected with an irreverence for which he afterward took his revenge in his prefaces. But his masques, a kind of opera, obtained general success; and the more Ben Jonson and the erudite strove to render tragedy and comedy tiresome, the more strongly did the public fall back upon masques for their amusement. Several poets of Shakspeare's school also endeavored to satisfy the taste of the public for the kind of pleasure to which he had accustomed them

Their efforts, attended with varying success, but maintained with untiring activity, kept up that taste for the drama which survives the epoch of its master-pieces. About five hundred and fifty dramas, without reckoning those of Shakspeare, Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, were printed before the Restoration of Charles II. Of these only thirty-eight can date from times anterior to Shakspeare; and it has been seen that, during his life, the custom was not to print those plays which were intended for representation on the stage. From 1640 to 1660, the Puritans closed nearly all the theatres; and most of these productions, therefore, belong to the twenty-five years which elapsed between the death of Shakspeare and the commencement of the civil wars. This was the weight beneath which the popularity of England's first dramatic poet succumbed for a time.

His memory, however, did not perish. In 1623, Heminge and Condell published the first complete edition of his dramas, thirteen of which only had been printed during his lifetime. His name was still held in respect; but for a finished reputation to inspire something beside respect, time must come to its aid, and must at first efface and suppress it, to give it at some future time the attraction of a neglected glory, and to stimulate the self-love and curiosity of inquiring minds to give it new life by a new examination, and to find in it the charm of a new discovery. A great writer rarely obtains, in the generation succeeding his own, the homage which posterity will lavish upon him. Sometimes even long spaces of time are necessary for the revolution commenced by a superior man to accomplish its course, and to bring the world to perceive its merits. Several causes combined to prolong the interval during which Shakspeare's works were regarded with coldness, and almost utterly forgotten.

The civil wars and the triumph of Puritanism occurred first, not only to interrupt all dramatic performances, but to destroy, as far as possible, every trace of amusement of this kind. The Restoration afterward introduced into England a foreign taste, which did not, perhaps, pervade the nation, but which held sway over the court. English literature then assumed a character which was not effaced by the new revolution of 1688; and French ideas, made honorable by the literary glory of the seventeenth century, and sustained by that of the eighteenth, retained in England a youthful and vigorous influence which had been lost by the old glories of Shakspeare. Fifty years after his death, Dryden declared that his idiom was a little "out of use." At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Lord Shaftesbury complained of his "natural rudeness, his unpolished style, and his antiquated phrase and wit;" and Shakspeare was then, for these reasons, excluded from several collections of the modern poets. In fact, Dryden did not understand Shakspeare, grammatically speaking; of this fact we have several proofs, and Dryden himself has proved, by recasting his pieces, that poetically he comprehended him as little. But not only was Shakspeare not understood, he soon became no longer known. In 1707, a poet named Tate produced a work entitled "King Lear," the subject of which, he said, he had borrowed from an obscure piece of the same name, recommended to his notice by a friend. This obscure piece was Shakspeare's "King Lear."

Distinguished writers, however, had not altogether ceased to allow Shakspeare a share in the literary glory of their country; but it was timidly and by degrees that they shook off the yoke of the prejudices of their time. If, in concert with Davenant, Dryden had recast the works of Shaks-

peare, Pope, in the edition which he published in 1725, contented himself with omitting all that he could not bring himself to regard as the work of the genius to whom he paid at least this homage. With regard to that which he was obliged to leave, Shakspeare, says Pope, "having at his first appearance no other aim in his writings than to procure a subsistence," wrote "for the people," without seeking to obtain "patronage from the better sort." In 1765, Johnson, waxing bolder, and gaining encouragement from the dawn of a return to the national taste, vigorously defended the romantic liberties of Shakspeare against the pretensions of classical authority; and though he made some concessions to the contempt of a more polished age for the vulgarity and ignorance of the old poet, he at least had the courage to remark that, when a country is "unenlightened by learning, the whole people is the vulgar."

Shakspeare's works, then, were reprinted and commented; but the mutilations alone obtained the honors of the stage. The Shakspeare amended by Dryden, Davenant, and others, was the only one which actors ventured to perform; and the "Tattler," having to quote some lines from "Macbeth," copied them from Davenant's amended edition. It was Garrick who, finding nowhere so fully as in Shakspeare means to supply the requirements of his own talent, delivered him from this disgraceful protection, lent to his ancient glory the freshness of his own young renown, and restored the poet to possession of the stage as well as of the patriotic admiration of the English.

Since that period, national pride has daily extended and redoubled this admiration. It nevertheless remained barren of results, and Shakspeare, to use the language of Sir Walter Scott, "reigned a Grecian prince over Persian slaves, and they who adored him did not dare attempt to

use his language." A new impulse can not be entirely due to old recollections; and an old epoch, that it may bear new fruit, needs to be again fertilized by a movement analogous to that which gave it its first fertility.

This movement has made itself felt in Europe, and England also is beginning to feel its impulse, as Sir Walter Scott's novels sufficiently demonstrate. But England will not be the only country indebted to Shakspeare for the new direction which is manifesting itself in her drama, as well as in other branches of her literature. In the literary movement by which it is now agitated, Continental Europe turns its eyes toward Shakspeare. Germany has long adopted him as a model rather than as a guide; and thereby it has, perhaps, suspended in their course those vivifying juices which impart their vigor and freshness only to fruits of native growth. Nevertheless, the path on which Germany has entered is leading to the discovery of true wealth; and if she will but work her own mines, a rich and fertile vein will not be wanting. The literature of Spain, a natural fruit of her civilization, already possesses its own original and distinct character. Italy alone and France, the fatherlands of modern classicism, are not yet recovered from their astonishment at the first shock given to those opinions which they have established with the rigor of necessity, and maintained with the pride of faith. Doubt presents itself to us as yet only as an enemy whose attacks we are beginning to fear; it seems as though discussion bears a threatening aspect, and that examination can not probe without undermining and overturning. In this position we hesitate, as if about to destroy that which will never be replaced; we are afraid of finding ourselves without law, and of discovering nothing but the insufficiency or illegitimacy of those principles

upon which we were formerly wont to rely without disquietude.

This disturbance of mind can not cease so long as the question remains undecided between science and barbarism, the beauties of order and the effects of disorder; so long as men persist in seeing, in that system of which the first outlines were traced by Shakspeare, nothing but an allowance of unrestrained liberty and undefined latitude to the flights of the imagination, as well as to the course of genius. If the romantic system has beauties, it necessarily has its art and rules. Nothing is beautiful, in the eyes of man, which does not derive its effects from certain combinations, the secret of which can always be supplied by our judgment when our emotions have attested its power. The knowledge or employment of these combinations constitutes art. Shakspeare had his own art. We must seek it out in his works, examine into the means which he employs, and the results to which he aspires. Then only shall we possess a true knowledge of his system; then we shall know how far it is capable of increased development, according to the nature of dramatic art, considered in its application to modern society.

It is, in fact, nowhere else—neither in past times, nor among peoples unacquainted with our habits—but among ourselves, and in ourselves, that we must seek the conditions and necessities of dramatic poetry. Differing in this respect from other arts, in addition to the absolute rules imposed upon it, as on all others, by the unchangeable nature of man, dramatic art has relative rules which flow from the changeful state of society. In imitating the antique style, modern statuary labor under no other constraint but the difficulty of equaling its perfection; and the most fervent and powerful adorer of antiquity would

not venture to reproduce, even upon the most submissive stage, all that he admires in a tragedy of Sophocles. It is easy to discern the cause of this. When contemplating a statue or a picture, the spectator receives at first, from the sculptor or the painter, the first impression which occurs to him ; but it rests with himself to continue the work. He stops and looks ; his natural disposition, his recollections and thoughts, group themselves around the leading idea which is presented to his view, and gradually develop within him the ever-increasing emotion which will soon hold entire dominion over him. The artist has done nothing but awaken in the spectator the faculty of conceiving and feeling ; it takes hold of the movement which has been communicated to it, follows it up in its own direction, accelerates it by its own strength, and thus creates for itself the pleasure which it enjoys. Before a picture of a martyrdom, one person is moved by the expression of fervent piety, another by the manifestation of resigned grief ; some are filled with indignation at the cruelty of the executioners. A tinge of courageous satisfaction which is evident in the look of the victim, reminds the patriot of the joys of devotion to a sacred cause ; and the soul of the philosopher is elevated by the contemplation of man sacrificing himself for truth. The diversity of these impressions is of little consequence ; they are all equally natural and equally free ; each spectator chooses, as it were, the feeling which suits him best, and when it has once entered into his soul, no external fact can disturb its supremacy, no movement can interrupt the course of that to which every man yields himself according to his inclination.

In the prolonged course of dramatic action, on the contrary, all becomes changed at every step, and each mo-

ment produces a new impression. The painter is satisfied with establishing one first and unvarying connection between his picture and the spectator. The dramatic poet must incessantly renew this relation, and maintain it through all the vicissitudes of the most various positions. All the acts in which human existence is manifested, all the forms which it assumes, and all the feelings which may modify it during the continuance of an always complicated event—these are the numerous and changeful objects which he presents to the public view; and he is never allowed to separate himself from his spectators, or to leave them for an instant alone and at liberty; he must be incessantly acting upon them, and must at every step excite in their souls emotions analogous to the ever-changing position in which he has placed them. How can he succeed in this, unless he carefully adapts himself to their dispositions and inclinations; unless he supplies the actual requirements of their mind; unless he addresses himself constantly to ideas which are familiar to them, and speaks to them in the language which they are accustomed to hear? Passion will not appear to us so touching if it be displayed in a manner contrary to our habits; and sympathy will not be awakened with the same vivacity in regard to interests of which we have ceased to be personally conscious. The necessity for appeasing the gods by a human sacrifice does not, in our mind, give that force to the speeches of Menelaus which it would have imparted to them among the Greeks, who were attached to their faith: the stern chastity of Hippolytus does not interest us in his fate: and virtue itself, in order to obtain from us that affectionate reverence which it has a right to expect, needs to connect itself with duties which our habits have taught us to respect and cherish.

Subject, therefore, at once to the conditions of the arts of imitation and to those of the purely poetical arts; bound, like epic poetry in its narratives, to set human life in motion; and called upon, like painting and sculpture, to present in its person and under its individual features—the dramatic poet is obliged to include, within the probabilities of one action, all the means which he requires to make it understood. His characters can only tell us what they would say if they were actually there, really occupied with the fact which they represent. The epic poet, as it were, does the honors, to his readers, of the edifice into which he introduces them; he accompanies them with his own speeches, assists them by his explanations, and, by the description of manners, times, and places, prepares them for the scene which he is about to disclose to their view, and opens to them in every sense the world into which he is desirous to transport them, and himself also. The dramatic personage comes forward alone, concerned with himself only; he places himself, without preliminary explanation, in communication with the spectator; and without calling or guiding them, he must make his audience follow him. Thus separated from one another, how can they succeed in coming into connection, unless a profound and general analogy already exists between them? Evidently those heroes, who do nothing for the public but speak and feel in their presence, will be understood and received by them only so far as they coincide with them in their mode of conceiving, feeling, and speaking; and dramatic effect can result only from their aptitude to unite in the same impressions.

The impressions of man communicated to man—this is, in fact, the sole source of dramatic effects. Man alone is the subject of the drama; man alone is its theatre. His

soul is the stage upon which the events of this world come to play their part ; it is not by their own virtue, but merely by their relations to the moral being whose destiny occupies our attention, that events take part in the action ; every dramatic character abandons them as soon as they aspire to exercise a direct influence over us, instead of acting by the intermediary of a visible person, and by means of the emotion which we receive, in our turn, from the emotion which they have excited in him. Why is the narrative of Theramenes epic, and not dramatic ? Because he addresses himself to the spectator, and not to Theseus. Theseus, being already aware of his son's death, is no longer capable of experiencing the impressions occasioned by the narrative ; and if, while still in uncertainty, he were only to arrive at a knowledge of his misfortune through the anguish of such a recital, the poetical ornaments with which it is, perhaps, overloaded would not prevent it from being dramatic, for the impressions which it produces would be to us those of a person interested in the result : we should be conscious of them in the heart of Theseus.

In the heart of man alone can the dramatic fact take place ; the event which is its occasion does not constitute it. The death of the lover is rendered dramatic by the grief of his mistress—the danger of the son by the terror of his mother ; and however horrible may be the idea of the murder of a child, Andromache inspires us with greater solicitude than Astyanax. An earthquake and the physical convulsions which accompany it will furnish only a spectacle for contemplation, or the subject of an epic narrative ; but the rain is dramatic upon the bald head of old Lear, and especially in the heart of his companions, racked by the pity which they feel for him. The

apparition of a spectre would have no effect upon the audience unless some one on the stage were alarmed by it; and to produce the dramatic effect of Lady Macbeth's somnambulism, Shakspeare has taken care that it should be witnessed by a physician and a waiting-woman, whom he has employed to transmit to us the terrible impressions which it produces upon themselves.

Thus man alone occupies the stage; his existence is displayed upon it, animated and aggrandized by the events which are connected with it, and which owe their theatrical character to this connection alone. In comedy, events; being of less magnitude than the passion which they excite in man, derive a laughable importance from this passion; in tragedy, being more powerful than the means which man has at his disposal, they move us by the exhibition of his grandeur and his weakness. The comic poet invents them freely, for his art consists in originating, in man himself and his absurdities, those events by which man is agitated. This invention is rarely a merit in the tragic poet, for his work is to discern and exhibit man and his soul in the midst of the events to which he is subjected. If it be generally requisite that the subject of tragedy should be taken from the history of the great and powerful, it is because the strong impressions which it aims at producing upon us can only be communicated to us by strong characters, incapable of succumbing beneath the blows of an ordinary destiny. It is in the development of high fortune and its terrible vicissitudes that the whole man appears, with all the wealth and energy of his nature. Thus the spectacle of the world, concentrated in an individual, is revealed to us upon the stage; thus, by the medium of the soul which

receives their impress, events reach us through sympathy, the source of dramatic illusion.

If material illusion were the aim of the arts, the wax-figures of Curtius would surpass all the statues of antiquity, and a panorama would be the ultimate effort of painting. If their object were to impose upon the reason, and to impart to the imagination a shock sufficiently powerful to pervert the judgment to such a degree that a theatrical representation could be taken for the accomplishment of a real and actual fact, a very few scenes would suffice to work up the spectators to such a pitch of excitement that its effect would soon be to interrupt the performance by the violence of their emotions. If even it were desired that, in presence of objects imitated by art of any kind, the soul, affected at least by the reality of the impressions which it receives from them, should really experience those feelings of which the image is produced in it by a fictitious representation, the labor of genius would have succeeded only in multiplying, in this world, the pains of life and the exhibition of human miseries. These feelings, however, occupy and pervade us, and on their existence depends the effect which the poet aims to produce upon us. We must believe in them in order to yield to them; and we could not believe in them unless we assigned to them a cause worthy to awaken them. When our tears flow before Raphael's picture of Christ bearing his cross, before we can allow them to flow, we must believe that we bestow them upon that sorrowful compassion which we should feel at really beholding such dreadful sufferings. If, in the emotions with which we are inspired by the sight of Tancred dying on the stage, we did not think we could recognize the emotions which we should feel for Tancred dying in reality, we should be

displeased with ourselves for indulging in a pity which was not rendered legitimate by its application to sorrows that at least were possible. And yet we deceive ourselves; that which we then discern in our breasts is not that power which is awakened at the aspect of the suffering of our fellows—a power full of bitterness if reduced to inactivity, but full of activity if it be allowed liberty and hope to render assistance. It is not this power, but its shadow—the image of our features repeated with striking accuracy, but without life, in a mirror. Moved at the aspect of what we should be capable of experiencing, we give up our imagination to it without having any demands to make upon our will. No one is tormented with an irrepressible desire to shout out to Tancred, Orosmane, or Othello, that they are laboring under a mistake; no one suffers through not being able to rush to the assistance of Gloster against the execrable Duke of Cornwall. The unendurable painfulness of the position of the spectators of such a scene is removed by the idea that it is utterly unreal; an idea which is presented to our minds, and which we retain without clearly perceiving its presence, because we are absorbed by the contemplation of the more vivid impressions which crowd upon our brain. If this idea were clearly present to our thoughts, it would dissipate the whole *cortège* of illusions which surround us, and we should summon it to our assistance to deaden their effect, if they should change into a subject for real grief. But so long as the spectator takes delight in forgetting it, art should studiously avoid every thing that might remind him that the spectacle which he contemplates is not real. Hence arises the necessity of bringing all the parts of the performance into harmonious unison, and of not diffusing unequally the force of the illusion, which loses strength

as soon as it allows itself to be perceived. This is what would happen if, at the moment when he is indulging in feelings which are familiar to him, the spectator were disconcerted by the presentation of forms of manners entirely foreign to his experience. Hence also arises the necessity of giving a certain amount of attention to the accessories, not in order to increase the illusion, but in order not to interfere with it. The actor alone is expected to produce that moral illusion which is aimed at by the drama. Where could we find means equal to those which he possesses for so doing? What imitation could stand beside his? What object in nature could be so well represented as man, when it is man himself who represents it? Let not dramatic art, therefore, seek assistance from other imitations which are far inferior to that which man can offer it; all that the machinist and the decorator have to do with the moral illusion is to remove every thing that might injure its effect. Perhaps even art would have reason to dread too great efforts on their part to do it service; who can tell whether a too brilliant magic of painting, employed to enhance the effect of the decorations, would not weaken the dramatic effect by diverting the attention to the enchantments of another art?

These accessory imitations are dangerous auxiliaries, whether, by their perfection, they usurp the effect to which they ought merely to contribute, or whether they destroy it by their inefficiency. In England, as we have seen, the early stage was entirely unacquainted with the art of decoration, a recent homage paid to probability, which becomes really useful to the dramatic illusion when, without pretending to increase it, it simply prevents it from having to surmount obstacles of too uncouth a nature, and enables the mind of the spectator to picture to itself with greater

distinctness the position into which it is required to transport itself. Imaginations more susceptible than they were delicate, and more easily affected than undeceived, had no need of that management which is now demanded by a restless reason, incessantly occupied in exercising surveillance over even our pleasures. Those spectators who exacted so little with regard to the decoration of the theatre, exacted a great deal in reference to the material movement of the scene; though indulgent to the insufficiency and rudeness of theatrical imitations, they were fond of variety, and scarcely perceived the improprieties which resulted therefrom. Just as a man might, without diminishing their emotion, represent to them the sensitive Ophelia or the delicate Desdemona, they could see stationed at one end of the stage the cannon which was to kill the Duke of Bedford at the opposite end, and this great event did not strike them less forcibly on account of the poverty of the arrangement; indeed, they could receive with all the force of dramatic illusion the touching impression of the death of the two Talbots on a field of battle, which was animated by the movements of four soldiers!

When the illusion becomes at once more difficult and more necessary to imaginations less quickly seduced, and to minds less easily amused, it is the study of art to remove every object that might prove injurious to it; and, as the representation of material objects becomes more perfect, it interferes less in the action of the drama, which is almost exclusively reserved for man, who alone can impart to it the appearance of reality. It was to man that, notwithstanding the habits of his time, Shakspeare felt that he must look for the production of this great effect. The movement of the stage, which, before his time, had constituted the chief interest of dramatic works, became in

his plays a simple accessory which the taste of his age did not allow him to omit, and which, perhaps, his own taste did not require him to sacrifice, but which he reduced to its true value. It matters little, therefore, that, in his dramas, the moral illusion may still be sometimes disturbed by the imperfect representation of objects which theatrical imitation could not compass; Shakspeare did not the less discern the true source of this illusion, and did not seek the means of producing it elsewhere.

He was equally well acquainted with its nature also; he felt that an illusion of this kind, akin to no error of the senses or the reason, but the simple result of a disposition of the soul, which forgets all extraneous things in order to contemplate itself, could only be sustained by the perpetual consent of the spectator to the seduction which the poet is desirous to exercise over him, and that this seductive influence must therefore be maintained unintermittingly. Whatever might be the power of a dramatic representation, it could not, from the outset, obtain a sufficient hold upon us to deliver us over in a defenseless state to all the feelings which will take possession of us in proportion as we advance in the position in which it has placed us. The imagination must lend itself gradually to this new position, and the soul must accustom itself to it, and accept the sway of the impressions which must arise from it, just as, when we experience an unexpected piece of good or bad fortune, we require some time to bring our feelings to a level with our fate. But if, after having obtained our consent to this position, and after having moved us by the impressions which accompany it, the poet imprudently attempts to make us pass into a new position, attended by new impressions, the work must be begun over again, and will require all the more effort, because it

will be necessary to efface the traces of a work already accomplished. Then the imagination becomes chilled and disturbed; the spectator refuses to lend himself to a movement from which he is diverted after having been desired to yield himself unresistingly to its influence. The illusion vanishes, and with it the interest also; for dramatic interest, in common with dramatic illusion, can only be attached to impressions which are continued and renewed in one and the same direction.

Unity of impression, that prime secret of dramatic art, was the soul of Shakspeare's great conceptions, and the instinctive object of his assiduous labor, just as it is the end of all the rules invented by all systems. The exclusive partisans of the classic system believed that it was impossible to attain unity of impression, except by means of what are called the three unities. Shakspeare attained it by other means. If the legitimacy of these means were recognized, it would greatly diminish the importance hitherto attributed to certain forms and rules, which are evidently invested with an abusive authority, if art, in order to accomplish its designs, does not need the restrictions which they impose upon it, and which often deprive it of a portion of its wealth.

The mobility of our imagination, the variety of our interests, and the inconstancy of our inclinations, have given to times, and even to places, a power which should not be lost sight of by the poet who is desirous to make use of the affections of man in order to excite the sympathy of his fellows. If he presents his hero to them at intervals too widely distant in the duration of his existence, they will inquire, "What has become of the man whom we knew six months ago?" just as naturally as, when meeting a friend six months after the occurrence of an event

which has plunged him into grief, we begin by inquiring discreetly into the state of that grief which we once saw so painfully manifested, for fear lest we should enter into communication with his soul before we know what feeling we shall have to participate. If compelled to give an account of the changes which have occurred during the course of six months or a year, to spectators who, only a short time previously, saw him disappear from the stage, would not the tragic hero present a strange incongruity with himself? would not the thread of his identity be broken? and, far from feeling the same interest in him, should we not have some difficulty in avowing him to be the same person?

From this condition of human nature has been derived the true motive of the unities of time and place, which have often been most preposterously founded upon a pretended necessity of satisfying the reason by accommodating the duration of the real action to that of the theatrical representation; as if the reason could consent to believe that, during the interval of a few minutes between the acts, the persons of the drama had passed from evening to morning without having slept, or from morning to evening without having eaten; and as if it were more easy to take three hours for a day than for a week, or even for a month!

Nevertheless, it can not be denied that the mind feels a certain repugnance to behold intervals of time and place disappear before it, without its being able to account for their departure, or receiving any modification from it. The more these intervals are prolonged, the more does this discontent increase, for the mind feels that many things are thus concealed from its knowledge of which it is its province to dispose, and it would not like to be told too often, as Crispin says to G ronte, "*C'est votre l thargie.*"

But these difficulties are not insurmountable by the skill of art ; if the mind becomes easily alarmed at that which, without its consent, disturbs the settled habits of its character, it is easy to make it forget them. Place it in view of the object toward which you have succeeded in directing its desires, and, in its forward spring to reach it, it will no longer care to measure the space which you compel it to traverse. When reading an interesting work, our strongly-excited attention transports us without difficulty from one time to another ; our thought concentrates itself upon the event at which we expect to arrive, and sees nothing in the interval which separates us from it ; and as it enables us to reach it, without having, as it were, changed our place, we are scarcely conscious that we have been obliged to change the time. When Claudius and Laertes have agreed together upon the duel in which Hamlet is to be slain, between that moment and the consummation of their plans we care little to know whether two hours or a week have elapsed.

This arises from the fact that the chain of the impressions has not been broken, and the position of the characters has not been changed ; their places have continued the same ; their ardor is not less energetic ; time has not acted upon them ; it counts for nothing in the feelings with which they inspire us ; it finds them, and us with them, in the same disposition of soul ; and thus the two periods are brought together by that unity of impression which makes us say, when thinking of an event which occurred long ago, but the traces of which are still fresh in our memory, "It seems as though it had happened only yesterday."

In fact, what care we about the time which elapses between the actions with which Macbeth fills up his career

of crime? When he commands the murder of Banquo, the assassination of Duncan is still present to our eyes, and seems as though it had been committed only yesterday; and when Macbeth determines upon the massacre of Macduff's family, we fancy we see him still pale from the apparition of Banquo's ghost. None of his actions has terminated without necessitating the action which follows it; they announce and involve each other, thus forcing the imagination to go forward, full of trouble and sad expectation. Macbeth, who, after having killed Duncan, is urged, by the very terror which he feels at his crime, to kill the chamberlains, to whom he intends to attribute the murder, does not permit us to doubt the facility with which he will commit new crimes whenever occasion requires. The witches, who, at the opening of the play, have taken possession of his destiny, do not allow us to hope that they will grant any respite to the ambition and the necessities of his crimes. Thus all the threads are laid open to our eyes from the beginning; we follow, we anticipate the course of events; we stint no haste to arrive at that which our imagination devours beforehand; intervals vanish with the succession of the ideas which should occupy them; one succession alone is distinctly marked in our mind, and that is, the succession of the events which compose the absorbing spectacle which sweeps us onward in its rapidity. In our view, they are as closely connected in time as they are intimately linked together in thought; and any duration that may separate them is a duration as empty and unperceived as that of sleep—as all those epochs in which the soul is manifested by no sensible symptom of its existence. What, in our mind, is the connection of the hours in comparison with this train of ideas? and what poet, subjecting himself to unity of time, would deem it suffi-

oient to establish, between the different parts of his work, that powerful bond of union which can result only from unity of impression ? So true is it that this alone is the object, whereas the others are only the means.

These means may, undoubtedly, sometimes have their efficiency ; the rapidity of a great action executed, or a great event accomplished, within the space of a few hours, fills the imagination, and animates the soul with a movement to which it yields with ardor. But few actions really permit so sudden an action ; few events are composed of parts so exactly connected in time and space ; and, without alluding to the improbabilities which are consequent upon their forced cohesion, the surprises which result from it very often disturb the unity of impression, which is the rigorous condition of dramatic illusion. *Zaïre*, passing suddenly from her devoted love for *Orosmane* to entire submission to the faith and will of *Lusignan*, has some difficulty in restoring to us, in her new position, as much illusion as she has made us lose by so abrupt a change. *Voltaire* sought his effects in the contrast of perfectly happy love with love in despair ; a powerful means, it is true, but less powerful, perhaps, than the preoccupation of a constant and unchanging position, which develops itself only to redouble the feeling which it has at first inspired. When we have thoroughly established ourselves in an affection, it is far from prudent to attempt to move us in favor of an opposite affection. *Corneille* has not shown us *Rodrigue* and *Chimène* together before the quarrel between their fathers ; he felt so little desire to impress us with the idea of their happiness, that *Chimène*, when told of it, can not believe it, and disturbs by her presentiments the too delightful position of which the poet is exceedingly careful not to put us in possession, lest we should after-

ward find it too difficult to sacrifice it to that duty which will soon command us to leave it. In the same manner, we have become associated with the feelings of Polyeucte, and have trembled for him before becoming aware of the love of Pauline for Sévère; if our first interest had been attached to this love, perhaps it would have been difficult for us afterward to feel much for Polyeucte, whose presence would be importunate. Thus, when Zaïre has awakened our emotion as a lover, we are inclined to think that she abandons the position in which she has placed us rather too easily, in order to fulfill her duty as a daughter and a Christian. The philosophical indifference which Voltaire has imparted to her in the first scene, in order to facilitate her subsequent conversion, renders still more improbable the devotedness with which she so quickly enters upon a duty so recently discovered. If, on the other hand, at the outset, Voltaire had described her to us as troubled with scruples, and disquieted with regard to her happiness, fear would have prepared us beforehand to comprehend in all its extent, at its first appearance, the misfortune which threatens her, and to see her yield to it with that abandonment which is improbable because it is too sudden.

The employment of sudden changes of fortune, by which it is attempted to disguise, beneath a great alteration in circumstances, the too sudden transitions which the rule of unity in point of time may impose, frequently renders the inconveniences of this rule more striking, by depriving it of the means of making preparation for the different impressions which it accumulates within too limited a space. It is, on the contrary, by a single impression that Shakspeare, at least in his finest compositions, takes possession, at the very outset, of our thought, and, by means of our thought, of space also. Beyond the magic circle which

he has traced, he leaves nothing sufficiently powerful to interfere with the effect of the only unity of which he has need. Change of fortune may exist in reference to the persons of the drama, but never to the spectator. Before we are informed of Othello's happiness, we know that Iago is preparing to destroy it; the Ghost which is to devote the life of Hamlet to the punishment of a crime, appears on the stage before he does; and before we have seen Macbeth virtuous, the utterance of his name by the Witches tells us that he is destined to become guilty. In the same manner, in "Athalie," the whole idea of the drama is displayed, in the first scene, in the character and promises of the high-priest; the impression is begun, and it will continue and increase always in the same direction. Thus, who could say that an interval of eight days, interposed, if necessary, between the promises of Joad and their performance, would have broken the unity of impression which results from the invariable constancy of his plans?

To constancy of character, feelings, and resolutions exclusively belongs that moral unity which, braving time and distance, includes all the parts of an event in a compact action, in which the gaps of maternal unity are no longer perceptible. A violently excited passion could not aim at such an effect; it has its momentary storms, the course of which, being subject to external and variable causes, must in a short time reach its term. As soon as jealousy has seized upon the heart of Othello, if any interval separated that moment from the time which witnesses the death of Desdemona, the unity would be broken; nothing would attest to us the link which must unite the first transports of the Moor to his final resolution; the action must therefore hasten rapidly forward, and must hurry him onward to his destruction, which a day's re-

flection would perhaps prevent him from consummating. In the same manner, the simple description of events, unless the presence of a great individual character should, by dominating over them, impress upon them its own unity, will make us feel the want of the material unities; and the efforts which Shakspeare has made, in his historical dramas, to approximate to them, or to disguise their absence, are a new homage paid to that moral unity which is sufficient for every thing when the poet possesses it, and which nothing can replace when he has it not. In "Hamlet" and "Macbeth," Shakspeare, inattentive to the course of time, allows it to pass unnoticed. In his historical plays, on the other hand, he conceals and dissembles its lapse by all the artifices that can deceive us in reference to its duration; the scenes follow and announce each other in such a way, that an interval of several years seems to be included within a few weeks, or even a few days. All the probabilities are sacrificed to this theatrical unity, which time would break too easily between events which are not linked together by a uniform principle. The scene in which Richard II. learns from Aumerle the departure of Bolingbroke into exile, is that in which he announces that he is himself about to go to Ireland; and it is not yet thoroughly known at court whether he has actually embarked on this voyage, when the news is received of the disembarkation of Bolingbroke, returning with an army, under the pretext of asserting his rights to the succession of his father, who has died in the interval, but, in reality, to take possession of the crown; in which attempt he has almost succeeded before Richard, cast by a tempest upon the coasts of England, can have been informed of his arrival. And we are told at the end of the play, which, dating from the

banishment of Bolingbroke, can not have lasted more than fifteen days, that Mowbray, who was exiled at the same time, has made several journeys to the Holy Land during the interval, and is at last dead in Italy.

These monstrous extravagances would assuredly not be numbered among the proofs of Shakspeare's genius, if they did not attest the empire assumed over him by the great dramatic thought to which he sacrificed all beside. Whether in his historical plays, he multiplies improbabilities and impossibilities in order to conceal the flight of time, or whether, in his finest tragedies, he allows it to pass without the slightest notice, he invariably pursues and attempts to maintain unity of impression, the great source of dramatic effect. We may see in "Macbeth," the true type of his system, with what art he overcomes the difficulties which arise from it, and links together in the soul of the spectator the chain of places and times which is constantly being broken in reality. Macbeth, when resolved on the destruction of Macduff, whom he fears, learns that he has taken flight into England; and he leaves the stage, announcing his intention to surprise his castle, and to put to death his wife, his children, and all who bear his name. The next scene opens in Macduff's castle, by a conversation between Lady Macduff and her relative, Rosse, who has come to inform her of her husband's departure, and to express his fears for her own safety. The two scenes, thus closely connected in thought, seem to be so in time also; distance has disappeared; and who would think of pointing out, as an interval of which some account should be given, the leagues which separate Macduff's castle from Macbeth's palace, and the time that would be required to traverse them. We have entered without effort into this new part of the position; it fol

lows its course ; the assassins appear ; the massacre commences. We pass into England ; we behold the arrival of Macduff in that country ; the terrible events of which he is ignorant fill up, for us, the interval which must separate his departure from his arrival. Rosse appears some time after him, and informs him of his misfortune. Both describe to Malcolm the desolation of Scotland, and the general hatred which Macbeth has incurred. The army which is destined to overthrow the tyrant is collected together, and the order for departure is given. But, while the army is on its road, the poet recalls our imagination toward Macbeth ; with him we prepare for the approach of the troops, whose march is effected without any thing occurring to inform us of its duration, or to lead us to make inquiries about it. Scarcely ever, in Shakspeare, do the personages of the drama arrive immediately in the place for which they have set out ; so abrupt a conjunction would be contrary to the natural order of the succession of ideas. We have seen Richard II. set out for the castle of John of Gaunt ; it is therefore in John of Gaunt's castle that we await the arrival of Richard, whose journey has taken place without our mind being able to complain of not having been consulted with regard to the time which it occupied. In the same manner, between two events evidently separated by an interval long enough for us not to like to see it disappear without taking some part in it, Shakspeare interposes a scene which may belong with equal propriety to either the first or the second epoch, and he makes us pass from one to the other without shocking us by its intimate connection with the scene which immediately precedes or follows it. Thus, in "King Lear," between the time when Lear divides his kingdom among his daughters, and the moment wher

Goneril, already tired of her father's presence, determines to get rid of him, the scenes at Gloster's castle, and the commencement of Edmund's intrigue, are interposed. Guided by that instinct which is the science of genius, the poet knows that our imagination will traverse without effort both time and space with him, if he spares those moral improbabilities which could alone arrest its progress. With this view, he sometimes accumulates material unlikelihoods, and sometimes exhausts the ingenuity of his art; but, ever attentive to the object at which he aims, he can reduce to unity of action those artifices and preparatory means which he employs to remove every thing that could interfere with the dramatic illusion, and to dispose freely of our thought.

Unity of action, being indispensable to unity of impression, could not escape Shakspeare's notice. But how, it may be asked, could he maintain it in the midst of so many events of so changeful and complicated a nature—in that immense field which includes so many places, so many years, all conditions of society, and the development of so many positions? Shakspeare succeeded in maintaining it, nevertheless: in "Macbeth," "Hamlet," "Richard III.," and "Romeo and Juliet," the action, though vast, does not cease to be one, rapid and complete. This is because the poet has seized upon its fundamental condition, which consists in placing the centre of interest where he finds the centre of action. The character which gives movement to the drama is also the one upon which the moral agitation of the spectator is bestowed. Duplicity of action, or at least of interest, has been urged against Racine's tragedy of "Andromaque," and the charge is not without foundation; it is not that all the parts of the action do not work together toward the same end, but the

interest is divided, and the centre of action is uncertain. If Shakspeare had had to treat of such a subject, which, it must be said, is not in great conformity to the nature of his genius, he would have made Andromache the centre of the action as well as of the interest. Maternal love would have pervaded the entire drama, displaying its courage as well as its fears, its strength as well as its sorrows. Shakspeare, indeed, would not have hesitated to introduce the child upon the stage, as Racine subsequently did in "Athalie," when he had grown more bold. All the emotions of the spectator would have been directed toward a single point: we should have beheld Andromache, with greater activity, trying other means to save Astyanax than "the tears of her mother," and constantly riveting upon her son and herself an attention which Racine has too often diverted to the means of action which he was constrained to derive from the vicissitudes of the destiny of Hermione. According to the system imposed upon our dramatic poets in the seventeenth century, Hermione should be the centre of the action; and so, in fact, she is. Upon a stage which daily became more subject to the authority of the ladies and of the court, love seemed destined to take the place of the fatality of the ancients: a blind power, as inflexible as fatality, and, like it, leading its victims toward an object defined from the very outset, love became the fixed point around which all things should revolve. In "Andromaque," love makes Hermione a simple personage, swayed by her passion, referring to it every thing that occurs beneath her view, and careful to bring events into subjection to herself, in order to make them serve and satisfy her affection. Hermione alone directs and gives movement to the drama; Andromaque only appears to suffer the agony of a position as pow-

erless as it is painful. Such an idea may admit of admirable developments of the passive affections of the heart, but it does not constitute a tragic action ; and in those developments which do not lead immediately to action, our interest runs the risk of wandering astray, and returns afterward with difficulty into the only direction in which it can be maintained.

When, on the contrary, the centre of action and the centre of interest are identical—when the attention of the spectator has been fixed upon the hero of the drama, at once active and unchanging, whose character, though it remains ever the same, will lead to incessant changes in his destiny—then the events in agitation around such a man strike us only by their relation to him, and the impression which we receive from them assumes the color which he has himself imparted to them. Richard III. proceeds from plot to plot ; every new success redoubles the terror with which we are inspired at the outset by his infernal genius ; the pity which each one of his victims successively awakes, becomes merged in the feelings of hate which accumulate upon their persecutor ; none of these particular feelings diverts our impressions to its own advantage ; they are directed incessantly, and always with increasing vigor, toward the author of so many crimes ; and thus Richard, the centre of action, is at the same time the centre of interest also ; for dramatic interest is not only the unquiet pity which we feel for misfortune, or the passionate affection with which we are inspired by virtue ; it is also hatred, the thirst for vengeance, the invocation of Heaven's justice upon the malefactor, as well as the prayer for the salvation of the innocent. All strong feelings, capable of exciting the human soul, can draw us in their train, and inspire us with passionate interest ;

they have no need to promise us happiness, or to gain our attachment by tenderness : we can also raise ourselves to that sublime contempt for life which makes men heroes and martyrs, and to that noble indignation beneath which tyrants succumb.

Every element may enter into an action thus reduced to one sole centre, from which emanate, and to which are related, all the events of the drama, and all the impressions of the spectator. Every thing that moves the heart of man, every thing that agitates his life, may combine to produce dramatic interest, provided that, being directed toward the same point, and marked with the same impress, the most various facts present themselves only as satellites of the principal fact, the brilliancy and power of which they serve to augment. Nothing will appear trivial, insignificant, or puerile, if it imparts greater vitality to the predominant position, or greater depth to the general feeling. Grief is sometimes redoubled by the aspect of gaiety ; in the midst of danger, a joke may increase our courage. Nothing is foreign to the impression but that which destroys it ; it nourishes itself, and gains greater power from every thing that can mingle with it. The prattle of young Arthur with Hubert becomes heart-rending from the idea of the horrible barbarity which Hubert is about to practice upon him. We are filled with emotion by the sight of Lady Macduff lovingly amused by the witty sallies of her little son, while at her door are the assassins who have come to massacre that son, and her other children, and afterward herself. Who, but for these circumstances, would take a deep interest in this scene of maternal childishness ? But, if this scene were omitted, should we hate Macbeth as much as we ought to do for this new crime ? In "Hamlet," not only is the scene of

the grave-diggers connected with the general idea of the piece by the kind of meditations which it inspires, but—and we know it—it is Ophelia's grave which they are digging in Hamlet's presence; and to Ophelia will relate, when he is informed of this circumstance, all the impressions which have been kindled in his soul by the sight of those hideous and despised bones, and the indifference which is felt for the mortal remains of those who were once beautiful and powerful, honored or beloved. No detail of these mournful preparations is lost to the feeling which they occasion; the coarse insensibility of the men devoted to the habits of such a trade, their songs and jokes, all have their effect; and the forms and means of comedy thus enter, without effort, into tragedy, the impressions of which are never more keen than when we see them about to fall upon a man who is already their unwitting subject, and who is amusing himself in presence of the misfortune of which he is unaware.

Without this use of the comic, and without this intervention of the inferior classes, how many dramatic effects, which contribute powerfully to the general effect, would become impossible! Accommodate to the taste of the pleasantries of our age the scene with Macbeth's porter, and there is no one who will not shudder at the thought of the discovery that will follow this exhibition of jovial buffoonery, and of the spectacle of carnage still concealed beneath these remnants of the intoxication of a festival. If Hamlet were the first brought into connection with his father's ghost, what preparation and explanations would be indispensable to place us in the state of mind in which a prince, a man belonging to the highest class of society, must be in order to believe in a ghost! But the phantom appears first to soldiers, men of simple mind, who are more ready

to be alarmed than astonished at it; and they relate the story to one another in the night-watch :

“ Last night of all,
When yond’ same star, that’s westward from the pole,
Had made his course t’ illume that part of heaven
Where now it burns, Marcellus, and myself,
The bell then beating one—

MARCELLUS.

Peace ! break thee off : look, where it comes again !”

The effect of terror is produced, and we believe in the spectre before Hamlet has ever heard it mentioned.

Nor is this all ; the intervention of the inferior classes furnishes Shakspeare with another means of effect, which would be impracticable in any other system. The poet who can take his actors from all ranks of society, and place them in all positions, may also bring every thing into action—that is to say, may remain constantly dramatic. In “ Julius Cæsar,” the scene opens with a living picture of popular movements and feelings ; what explanation or conversation could make us so well acquainted with the nature of the seductive influence exercised by the Dictator over the Romans, of the kind of danger to which liberty is exposed, and of the error, as well as the peril, of the republicans who hope to restore liberty by the death of Cæsar ? When Macbeth determines to get rid of Banquo, he has not to inform us of his project in the person of a confidant, or to receive an account of the execution of the deed in order to make us aware of it : he sends for the assassins and converses with them ; we witness the artifices by which a tyrant renders the passions and misfortunes of man subservient to his designs ; and we afterward see the murderers lie in wait for their victim, strike the fatal blow, and return, with blood-stained hands, to demand their re-

ward. Banquo can then appear to us ; the real presence of crime has produced all its effect, and we reject none of the terrors which accompany it.

When we desire to produce man upon the stage in all the energy of his nature, it is not too much to summon to our aid man as a whole, and to exhibit him under all the forms and in all the positions of which his existence admits. Such a representation is not merely more complete and striking, but it is also more truthful and accurate. We deceive the mind with regard to an event, if we present to it merely one salient part adorned with the colors of truth, while the other part is rejected and effaced in a conversation or a narrative. Thence results a false impression which, in more than one instance, has injured the effect of the finest works. "Athalie," that masterpiece of our drama, still finds us imbued with a certain prejudice against Joad and in favor of Athalie, whom we do not hate sufficiently to rejoice in her destruction, and whom we do not fear enough to approve the artifice which draws her into the snare. And yet Athalie has not only massacred her son's children, in order that she might reign in their stead ; but she is a foreigner, maintained on the throne by foreign troops ; the enemy of the God adored by her people, she insults and braves Him by the presence and pomp of a foreign worship ; while the national religion, stripped of its power and honors, and clung to with fear and trembling by only "a small number of zealous worshipers," daily expects to fall a victim to the hatred of Mathan, the insolent despotism of the queen, and the avidity of her base courtiers. Here is, indeed, an exhibition of tyranny and misfortune ; here is matter enough to drive the people to revolt, and to lead to conspiracies among the last defenders of their liberties. And all these facts

are related in the speeches of Joad, of Abner, of Mathan, and even of Athalie herself. But they are displayed in speeches only; all that we behold in action is Joad conspiring with the means which his enemy still leaves at his disposal, and the imposing grandeur of the character of Athalie. The conspiracy is under our eyes; but we have only heard of tyranny. If the action had revealed to us the evils which oppression involves; if we had beheld Joad excited and stimulated to revolt by the cries of the unhappy victims of the vexations of the foreigner; if the patriotic and religious indignation of the people against a power "lavish of the blood of the defenseless," had given legitimacy to Joad's conduct in our eyes—the action, when thus completed, would leave no uncertainty in our minds; and "Athalie" would perhaps present to us the ideal of dramatic poetry, at least, according to our conception of it at the present time.

Though easily attained among the Greeks, whose life and feelings might be summed up in a few large and simple features, this ideal did not present itself to modern nations under forms sufficiently general and pure to receive the application of the rules laid down in accordance with the ancient models. France, in order to adopt them, was compelled to limit its field, in some sort, to one corner of human existence. Our poets have employed all the powers of genius to turn this narrow space to advantage; the abysses of the heart have been sounded to their utmost depth, but not in all their dimensions. Dramatic illusion has been sought at its true source, but it has not been required to furnish all the effects that might have been obtained from it. Shakspeare offers to us a more fruitful and a vaster system. It would be a strange mistake to suppose that he has discovered and brought to light

all its wealth. When we embrace human destiny in all its aspects, and human nature in all the conditions of man upon earth, we enter into possession of an exhaustless treasure. It is the peculiar advantage of such a system, that it escapes, by its extent, from the dominion of any particular genius. We may discover its principles in Shakspeare's works; but he was not fully acquainted with them, nor did he always respect them. He should serve as an example, not as a model. Some men, even of superior talent, have attempted to write plays according to Shakspeare's taste, without perceiving that they were deficient in one important qualification for the task; and that was, to write as he did, to write them for our age, just as Shakspeare's plays were written for the age in which he lived. This is an enterprise, the difficulties of which have hitherto, perhaps, been maturely considered by no one. We have seen how much art and effort was employed by Shakspeare to surmount those which are inherent in his system. They are still greater in our times, and would unvail themselves much more completely to the spirit of criticism which now accompanies the boldest essays of genius. It is not only with spectators of more fastidious taste, and of more idle and inattentive imagination, that the poet would have to do, who should venture to follow in Shakspeare's footsteps. He would be called upon to give movement to personages embarrassed in much more complicated interests, pre-occupied with much more various feelings, and subject to less simple habits of mind, and to less decided tendencies. Neither science, nor reflection, nor the scruples of conscience, nor the uncertainties of thought, frequently encumber Shakspeare's heroes; doubt is of little use among them, and the violence of their passions speedily transfers their belief to the side of their

desires, or sets their actions above their belief. Hamlet alone presents the confused spectacle of a mind formed by the enlightenment of society, in conflict with a position contrary to its laws; and he needs a supernatural apparition to determine him to act, and a fortuitous event to accomplish his project. If incessantly placed in an analogous position, the personages of a tragedy conceived at the present day, according to the romantic system, would offer us the same picture of indecision. Ideas now crowd and intersect each other in the mind of man, duties multiply in his conscience, and obstacles and bonds around his life. Instead of those electric brains, prompt to communicate the spark which they have received—instead of those ardent and simple-minded men, whose projects, like Macbeth's, "will to hand"—the world now presents to the poet minds like Hamlet's, deep in the observation of those inward conflicts which our classical system has derived from a state of society more advanced than that of the time in which Shakspeare lived. So many feelings, interests, and ideas, the necessary consequences of modern civilization, might become, even in their simplest form of expression, a troublesome burden, which it would be difficult to carry through the rapid evolutions and bold advances of the romantic system.

We must, however, satisfy every demand; success itself requires it. The reason must be contented at the same time that the imagination is occupied. The progress of taste, of enlightenment, of society, and of mankind, must serve, not to diminish or disturb our enjoyment, but to render them worthy of ourselves, and capable of supplying the new wants which we have contracted. Advance without rule and art in the romantic system, and you will produce melodramas calculated to excite a passing emotion

in the multitude, but in the multitude alone, and for a few days; just as, by dragging along without originality in the classical system, you will satisfy only that cold literary class who are acquainted with nothing in nature which is more important than the interests of versification, or more imposing than the three unities. This is not the work of the poet who is called to power and destined for glory; he acts upon a grander scale, and can address the superior intellects, as well as the general and simple faculties of all men. It is doubtless necessary that the crowd should throng to behold those dramatic works of which you desire to make a national spectacle; but do not hope to become national if you do not unite in your festivities all those classes of persons and minds whose well-arranged hierarchy raises a nation to its loftiest dignity. Genius is bound to follow human nature in all its developments; its strength consists in finding within itself the means for constantly satisfying the whole of the public. The same task is now imposed upon government and upon poetry; both should exist for all, and suffice at once for the wants of the masses and for the requirements of the most exalted minds.

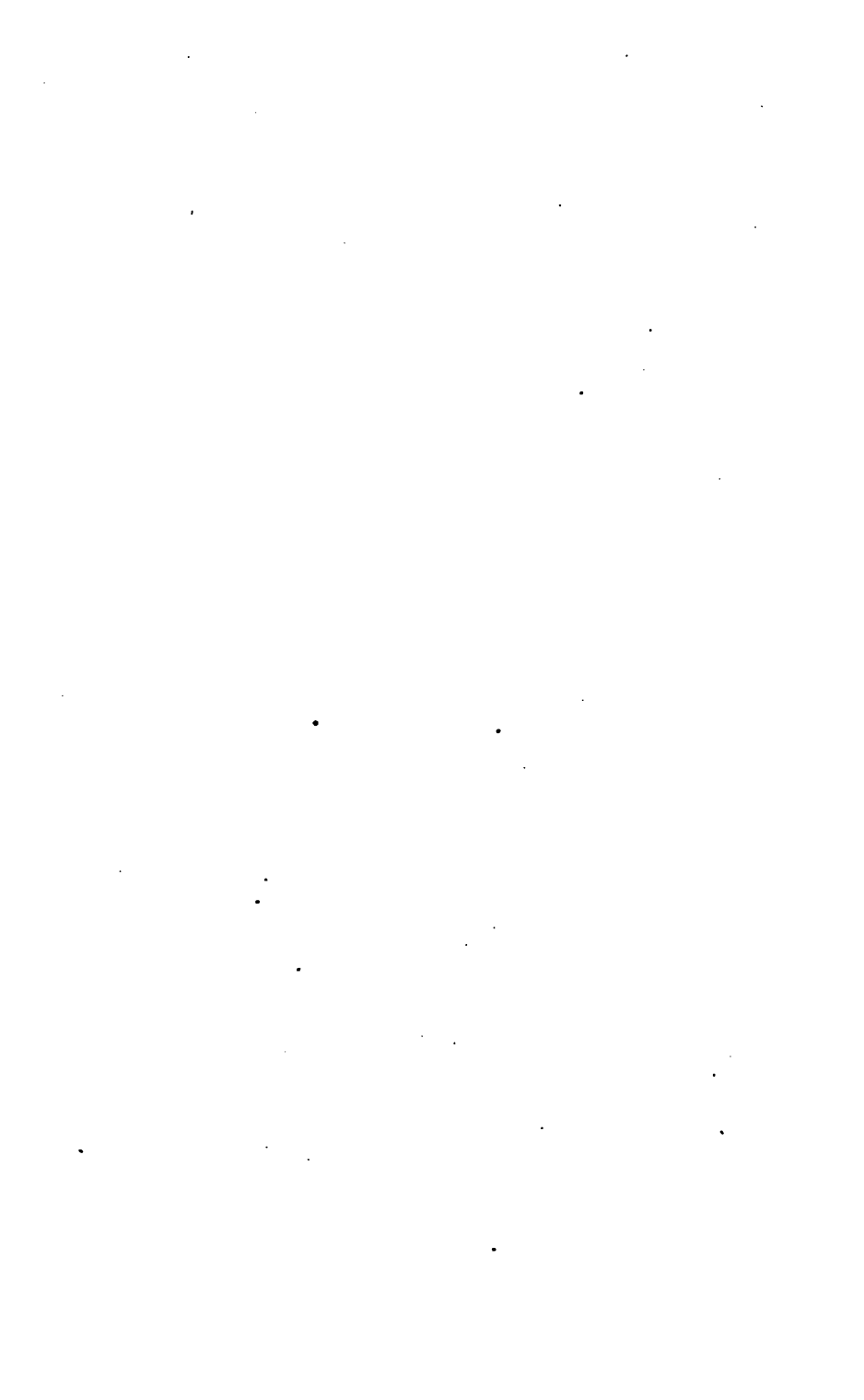
Doubtless stopped in its course by these conditions, the full severity of which will only be revealed to the talent that can comply with them, dramatic art, even in England, where, under the protection of Shakspeare, it would have liberty to attempt any thing, scarcely ventures at the present day to endeavor timidly to follow him. Meanwhile, England, France, and the whole of Europe demand of the drama pleasures and emotions that can no longer be supplied by the inanimate representation of a world that has ceased to exist. The classical system had its origin in the life of its time; that time has passed; its image subsists in brilliant colors in its works, but can no more be repro-

duced. Near the monuments of past ages, the monuments of another age are now beginning to arise. What will be their form? I can not tell; but the ground upon which their foundations may rest is already perceptible. This ground is not the ground of Corneille and Racine, nor is it that of Shakspeare; it is our own; but Shakspeare's system, as it appears to me, may furnish the plans according to which genius ought now to work. This system alone includes all those social conditions and all those general or diverse feelings, the simultaneous conjunction and activity of which constitute for us, at the present day, the spectacle of human things. Witnesses, during thirty years, of the greatest revolutions of society, we shall no longer willingly confine the movement of our mind within the narrow space of some family event, or the agitations of a purely individual passion. The nature and destiny of man have appeared to us under their most striking and their simplest aspect, in all their extent and in all their variableness. We require pictures in which this spectacle is reproduced, in which man is displayed in his completeness, and excites our entire sympathy. The moral dispositions which impose this necessity upon poetry will not change; but we shall see them, on the contrary, manifesting themselves more plainly, and receiving greater development, day by day. Interests, duties, and a movement common to all classes of citizens, will strengthen among them that chain of habitual relations with which all public feelings connect themselves. Never could dramatic art have taken its subjects from an order of ideas at once more popular and more elevated; never was the connection between the most vulgar interests of man and the principles upon which his highest destinies are dependent, more clearly present to all minds; and the importance of

an event may now appear in its pettiest details as well as in its mightiest results. In this state of society, a new dramatic system ought to be established. It should be liberal and free, but not without principles and laws. It should establish itself like liberty, not upon disorder and forgetfulness of every check, but upon rules more severe and more difficult of observance, perhaps, than those which are still enforced to maintain what is called order against what is designated license.



HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL NOTICES
OF THE
PRINCIPAL DRAMAS OF SHAKSPEARE.



ROMEO AND JULIET.

(1595.)

Two powerful families of Verona, the Montecchi and the Capelletti (the Montagues and Capulets), had long lived on terms of such hostility to each other, that it had frequently led to sanguinary conflicts in the open streets. Alberto della Scala, the second perpetual captain of Verona, had ineffectually endeavored to reconcile them; but he succeeded so far in bridling their enmity, that "when they met," says Girolamo della Corte, the historian of Verona, "the younger men made way for their elders, and they mutually exchanged salutations."

In the year 1303, under the reign of Bartolommeo della Scala, who had been chosen perpetual captain on the death of his father Alberto, Antonio Capelletto, the leader of his faction, gave a great entertainment during the carnival, to which he invited most of the nobility of Verona. Romeo Montecchio, who was about twenty-one years of age, and one of the handsomest and most amiable young men in the city, went thither in a mask, accompanied by some of his friends. After some time, taking off his mask, he sat down in a corner, from which he could see and be seen. Much astonishment was felt at the boldness with which he had thus ventured in the midst of his enemies. However, as he was young and of agreeable manners, the

Capulets, says the historian, "did not pay so much attention to his presence as they might have done if he had been older." His eyes and those of Giulietta Capelletto soon met, and being equally struck with admiration, they did not cease to look at each other. The festivities terminated with a dance, which "among us," says Girolamo, "is called the hat-dance (*dal cappello*)," in which Romeo engaged; but, after having danced a few figures with his partner, he left her to join Juliet, who was dancing with another. "Immediately that she felt him touch her hand, she said, 'Blessed be your coming!' And he, pressing her hand, replied, 'What blessing do you receive from it, lady?' And she answered, with a smile, 'Be not surprised, sir, that I bless your coming; Signor Mercurio had been chilling me for a long while, but by your politeness you have restored me to warmth.' (The hands of this young man, who was called Mercurio the Squinter, and who was beloved by every one for the charms of his mind, were always colder than ice.) To these words, Romeo replied, 'I am greatly delighted to do you service in any thing.' When the dance was over, Juliet could say no more than this: 'Alas! I am more yours than my own.'"

Romeo having repaired on several occasions to a small street upon which Juliet's windows looked out, one evening she recognized him "by his sneezing or some other sign," and opened the window; they saluted each other very courteously (*cortesissimamente*), and, after having conversed for a long while of their loves, they agreed that they must be married, whatever might happen; and that the ceremony should be performed by Friar Leonardo, a Franciscan monk, who was "a theologian, a great philosopher, an admirable distiller, a proficient in the art of magic," and the confessor of nearly all the town. Romeo

went to see this worthy; and the monk, thinking of the credit he would gain, not only with the perpetual captain, but also with the whole city, if he succeeded in reconciling the two families, acceded to the request of the young couple. On Quadregesima Sunday, when confession was obligatory, Juliet went with her mother to the church of St. Francis in the citadel; and having entered first into the confessional, on the other side of which Romeo was stationed, they received the nuptial benediction through the window of the confessional, which the monk had had the kindness to leave open. Afterward, by the connivance of a very adroit old nurse of Juliet's, they spent the night together in her garden.

However, after the festival of Easter, a numerous troop of Capulets met, at a little distance from the gates of Verona, a band of Montagues, and attacked them, at the instigation of Tebaldo, a cousin-german of Juliet, who, seeing Romeo use every effort to put an end to the combat, went up to him, and, forcing him to defend himself, received a sword-thrust in his throat, from which he fell dead on the spot. Romeo was banished; and a short time afterward, Juliet, on the point of finding herself compelled to marry another, had recourse to Friar Leonardo, who gave her a powder to swallow, by means of which she would appear to be dead, and would be interred in the family vault, which happened to be in the church attached to Leonardo's convent. The monk was to deliver her immediately from her grave, and to send her in disguise to Mantua, where Romeo was residing; and he promised to inform her lover of their design.

Matters were arranged as Leonardo had suggested; but Romeo, having been informed of Juliet's death by an indirect source, before he received the monk's letter, set out

at once for Verona with a single domestic, and, having provided himself with a violent poison, hastened to the tomb, opened it, bathed Juliet's body with his tears, swallowed the poison, and died. Juliet awaking from her trance the instant afterward, seeing Romeo dead, and learning from the monk, who had come up in the meanwhile, all that had happened, was seized with such violent paroxysms of grief, that, "without being able to utter a word, she fell dead upon the bosom of her Romeo."*

This story is told as true by Girolamo della Corte, and he assures his readers that he had often seen the tomb of Romeo and Juliet, which, rising a little above the level of the ground, and being situated near a well, then served as a laundry to the orphan asylum of St. Francis, which was being built in that locality. He relates, at the same time, that the Cavalier Gerardo Boldiero, his uncle, who had first taken him to this tomb, had pointed out to him, at a corner of the wall, near the Capuchin Convent, the place from which he had heard it said that the bones of Romeo and Juliet, and of several other persons, had been transferred a great number of years before. Captain Bréval, in his *Travels*, also mentions that he saw at Verona, in 1762, an old building which was then an orphan asylum, and which his guide informed him had once contained the tomb of Romeo and Juliet, but that it no longer existed.

It was probably not in accordance with the narrative of Girolamo della Corte that Shakspeare composed his tragedy. It was first performed, as it would appear, in 1595, under the patronage of Lord Hunsdon, the Lord Chamberlain of Queen Elizabeth, and was printed for the first time in 1597. Now the work of Girolamo della Cor-

* See Girolamo della Corte, "*Istorie di Verona*," vol. i., p. 589, *et seq.* ed. 1594.

te, which was intended to contain twenty-two books, was interrupted in the middle of the twentieth book, and in the year 1560, by the illness of the author. We learn, moreover, from the editor's preface, that this illness was prolonged, and terminated in the death of the historian; that the necessity for revising a work, to which Girolamo himself had been unable to give the finishing stroke, occupied a considerable period; and, finally, that the lawsuits, "both civil and criminal," with which the editor was tormented, prevented him from bringing his undertaking to a conclusion as promptly as he could have desired; so that the work of Girolamo could not have been published until a long while after his death. The edition of 1594 is, therefore, to all appearance, the first edition, and could scarcely have fallen into Shakspeare's hands so early as 1595.*

But the history of Romeo and Juliet, which was doubtless very popular at Verona, had already formed the subject of a novel by Luigi da Porto, published at Venice in 1535, six years after the death of the author, under the title of "*La Giuletta*." This novel was reprinted, translated and imitated in several languages, and furnished Arthur Brooke with the subject of an English poem, which was published in 1562, and from which Shakspeare certainly derived the subject of his tragedy.* The imitation is complete. Juliet, in Brooke's poem, as well as in the novel of Luigi da Porto, kills herself with Romeo's dagger, instead of dying of grief, as in the history of Girolamo della Corte; but it is a singular circumstance, that both

* The title is, "The Tragicall Historie of Romeus and Juliet, containing a rare Example of true Constancie; with the Subtill Counsels and Practises of an old Fryer, and their ill event." This poem has been reprinted at the end of the tragedy in the large editions of Shakspeare; among others, in Malone's edition.

Arthur Brooke's poem and Shakspeare's tragedy make Romeo die, as in the history, before Juliet awakes, whereas, in the novel of Luigi da Porto, he does not die until after he has witnessed her restoration to life, and had a scene of sorrowful farewell with her. Shakspeare has been blamed for not having adopted this version, which would have furnished him with a very pathetic position; and it has been inferred that he was not acquainted with the Italian novel, although it had been translated into English. Several circumstances, however, give us reason to believe that Shakspeare was acquainted with this translation. As for his motives for preferring the poet's narrative to that of the novelist, he may have had many; in the first place, to account for his departing in so important a point from the novel of Luigi da Porto, which he has followed most scrupulously in almost every other particular, perhaps Arthur Brooke, the author of the poem, may have had some knowledge of the true history, as related by Girolamo della Corte. Being a contemporary of Shakspeare, he may have communicated this to him, and Shakspeare's careful conformity, as far as he was able, to history, or to the narratives received as such, would not have allowed him to hesitate as to his choice. Moreover—and this was probably the true reason of the poet—Shakspeare very seldom precedes a strong resolution by long speeches. As Macbeth says:

“Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives.”

Whatever anguish reflection may add to grief, it fixes the mind on too large a number of objects not to distract it from the single and absorbing idea which leads to desperate actions. After having received Romeo's farewell, and lamented his death in concert with him, it might have

happened that Juliet would have bewailed him all her life instead of killing herself on the spot. Garrick rewrote the scene in the monument, in accordance with the supposition adopted in the novel of Luigi da Porto; the scene is touching, but, as was perhaps inevitable in such a situation, which it would be impossible to delineate in words, the feelings are too much and too little agitated, and the despair is either excessive or not sufficiently violent. In the laconism of Shakspeare's "Romeo and Juliet," in these last moments, there is much more passion and truth.

This laconism is all the more remarkable, because during the whole course of the play, Shakspeare has abandoned himself without constraint to that abundance of reflection and discourse which is one of the characteristics of his genius. Nowhere is the contrast more striking between the depth of the feelings which the poet describes, and the form in which he expresses them. Shakspeare excels in seeing our human feelings as they really exist in nature, without premeditation, without any labor of man upon himself, ingenuous and impetuous, mingled of good and evil, of vulgar instincts and sublime inspirations, just as the human soul is, in its primitive and spontaneous state. What can be more truthful than the love of Romeo and Juliet, so young, so ardent, so unreflecting, full at once of physical passion and of moral tenderness, without restraint, and yet without coarseness, because delicacy of heart ever combines with the transports of the senses! There is nothing subtle or factitious in it, and nothing cleverly arranged by the poet; it is neither the pure love of piously exalted imaginations, nor the licentious love of palled and perverted lives; it is love itself—love complete, involuntary and sovereign, as it bursts forth in early youth, in the heart of man, at once simple

and diverse, as God made it. "Romeo and Juliet" is truly the tragedy of love, as "Othello" is that of jealousy, and "Macbeth" that of ambition. Each of the great dramas of Shakspeare is dedicated to one of the great feelings of humanity; and the feeling which pervades the drama is, in very reality, that which occupies and possesses the human soul when under its influence. Shakspeare omits, adds, and alters nothing; he brings it on the stage simply and boldly, in its energetic and complete truth.

Pass now from the substance to the form, and from the feeling itself to the language in which it is clothed by the poet; and observe the contrast! In proportion as the feeling is true and profoundly known and understood, its expression is often factitious, laden with developments and ornaments in which the mind of the poet takes delight, but which do not flow naturally from the lips of a dramatic personage. Of all Shakspeare's great dramas, "Romeo and Juliet" is, perhaps, the one in which this fault is most abundant. We might almost say that Shakspeare had attempted to imitate that copiousness of words, and that verbose facility which, in literature as well as life, generally characterize the peoples of the South. He had certainly read, at least in translation, some of the Italian poets; and the innumerable subtleties interwoven, as it were, into the language of all the personages in "Romeo and Juliet," and the introduction of continual comparisons with the sun, the flowers, and the stars, though often brilliant and graceful, are evidently an imitation of the style of the sonnets, and a debt paid to local coloring. It is, perhaps, because the Italian sonnets almost always adopt a plaintive tone, that choice and exaggeration of language are particularly perceptible in the complaints of the two lovers. The expression of their brief happiness is, espe-

cially in the mouth of Juliet, of ravishing simplicity ; and when they reach the final term of their destiny, when the poet enters upon the last scene of this mournful tragedy, he renounces all his attempts at imitation, and all his wittily wise reflections. His characters, who, says Johnson, "have a conceit left them in their misery," lose this peculiarity when misery has struck its heavy blows ; the imagination ceases to play ; passion itself no longer appears, unless united to solid, serious, and almost stern feelings ; and that mistress, who was so eager for the joys of love, Juliet, when threatened in her conjugal fidelity, thinks of nothing but the fulfillment of her duties, and how she may remain without blemish the wife of her dear Romeo. What an admirable trait of moral sense and good sense is this in a genius devoted to the delineation of passion !

However, Shakspeare was mistaken when he thought that, by prodigality of reflections, imagery, and words, he was imitating Italy and her poets. At least he was not imitating the masters of Italian poetry, his equals, and the only ones who deserved his notice. Between them and him, the difference is immense and singular. It is in comprehension of the natural feelings that Shakspeare excels, and he depicts them with as much simplicity and truth of substance as he clothes them with affectation and sometimes whimsicality of language. It is, on the contrary, into these feelings themselves that the great Italian poets of the fourteenth century, and especially Petrarch, frequently introduce as much refinement and subtlety as elevation and grace ; they alter and transform, according to their religious and moral beliefs, or even to their literary tastes, those instincts and passions of the human heart to which Shakspeare leaves their native physiognomy and

liberty. What can be less similar than the love of Petrarch for Laura, and that of Juliet for Romeo? In compensation, the expression, in Petrarch, is almost always as natural as the feeling is refined; and whereas Shakspeare presents perfectly simple and true emotions beneath a strange and affected form, Petrarch lends to mystical, or at least singular and very restrained emotions, all the charm of a simple and pure form.

I will quote only one example of this difference between the two poets, but it is a very striking example, for it is one in which both have tried their powers upon the same position, the same feeling, and almost the same image.

Laura is dead. Petrarch is desirous of depicting, on her entrance upon the sleep of death, her whom he had painted so frequently, and with such charming passion, in the brilliancy of life and youth:

“Non come fiamma che per forza è spenta,
 Ma che per sè medesima si consuma,
 Se n'andò in pace l'animo contenta.
 A guisa d'un soave e chiaro lume,
 Cui nutrimento a poco a poco manca,
 Tenendo al fin il suo usato costume;
 Pallida no, ma più che neve bianca
 Che senza vento in un bel colle fiocchi,
 Parea posar come persona stanca.
 Quasi un dolce dormir ne' suoi begli occhi,
 Sendo lo sperto già de lei diviso,
 Era quel che morir chiaman gli sciocchi,
 Morte bella parea nel suo bel viso.”*

The following translation is from the pen of Captain Macgregor:

“Not as a flame which suddenly is spent,
 But one that gently finds its natural close,
 To heaven, in peace, her willing spirit rose;

* Petrarch, “Trionfo della Morte,” cap. i., lines 160–172.

As, nutriment denied, a lovely light,
 By fine gradations failing, less, less bright,
 E'en to the last gives forth a lambent glow :
 Not pale, but fairer than the virgin snow,
 Falling, when winds are laid, on earth's green breast,
 She seem'd a saint from life's vain toils at rest.
 As if a sweet sleep o'er those bright eyes came,
 Her spirit mounted to the throne of grace !
 If this we, in our folly, Death do name,
 Then Death seem'd lovely on that lovely face."*

Juliet also is dead. Romeo contemplates her as she lies in her tomb, and he also expatiates upon her beauty :

* * * "O, my love ! my wife !
 Death, that hath suck'd the honey of thy breath,
 Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty ;
 Thou art not conquer'd ; beauty's ensign yet
 Is crimson in thy lips and on thy cheeks,
 And death's pale flag is not advanced there."

I need not insist upon the comparison ; who does not feel how much more simple and beautiful the form of expression is in Petrarch ? It is the brilliant and flowing poetry of the South, beside the strong, rough, and vigorous imagination of the North.

The love of Romeo for Rosaline is an invention of Luigi da Porto, retained in the poem of Arthur Brooke. This invention imparts so little interest to the first acts of the drama, that Shakspeare probably adopted it merely with a view to giving greater effect to that character of suddenness which distinguishes the passions of a Southern clime. The part of Mercutio was suggested to him by these lines of the English poem :

"A courtier that eche where was highly had in price,
 For he was courteous of his speeche, and pleasant of devise.
 Even as a lyon would among the lambs be bolde,
 Such was among the bashful maydes Mercutio to beholde."

* Macgregor's "Odes of Petrarch," p. 220.

Such was, doubtless, the *bel air* in Shakspeare's time, and it is as the type of the amiable and amusing companion that he has described Mercutio. However, though he was not bold enough to attack, like Molière, the ridiculous absurdities of the court, he very frequently makes it evident that its tone was a burden to him; and the part of Mercutio seems to have been a great tax upon his taste and uprightness of mind. Dryden relates as a tradition of his time, that Shakspeare used to say, "that he was obliged to kill Mercutio in the third act, lest he should have been killed by him." Mercutio has, nevertheless, had many zealous partisans in England; among others, Johnson, who, on this occasion, soundly rates Dryden for his irreverent words regarding the witty Mercutio, "some of whose sallies," he says, "are perhaps out of the reach of Dryden." Shakspeare's aversion for the kind of wit of which he has been so lavish in "Romeo and Juliet," is sufficiently proved by Friar Laurence's injunction to Romeo when he begins to explain his position in the sonnet style :

"Be plain, good son, and homely in thy drift;
Riddling confession finds but riddling shrift."

Friar Laurence is the wise man of the play, and his speeches are, in general, as simple as it was allowable for those of a philosopher to be in his time.

The part of Juliet's nurse also contains but few of these subtleties, which Shakspeare seems to have reserved, in this work, to persons of the higher classes, and sometimes to the valets who ape their manners. The character of the nurse is indicated in Arthur Brooke's poem; in which, however, it is far from possessing the same homely truthfulness as in Shakspeare's drama.

Wherever they are not disfigured by conceits, the lines in "Romeo and Juliet" are perhaps the most graceful and brilliant that ever flowed from Shakspeare's pen. They are, for the most part, written in rhyme, another homage paid to Italian habits.

H A M L E T.

(1596.)

"HAMLET" is not the finest of Shakspeare's dramas ; "Macbeth," and, I think, "Othello" also, are, on the whole, superior to it : but it perhaps contains the most remarkable examples of its author's most sublime beauties, as well as of his most glaring defects. Never has he unveiled with more originality, depth, and dramatic effect the inmost state of a mighty soul ; never, also, has he yielded with greater unrestraint to the terrible or burlesque fancies of his imagination, and to the abundant intemperance that is characteristic of a mind which hastens to diffuse its ideas without any selection, and which delights to render them striking by a strong, ingenious, and unexpected expression, without caring to give them a pure and natural form.

According to his custom, Shakspeare took no trouble in "Hamlet," either to invent or to arrange his subject. He took the facts as he found them recorded in the fabulous stories of the ancient history of Denmark, by Saxo Grammaticus, which were transformed into tragical histories by Belleforest, about the middle of the sixteenth century, and were immediately translated and became popular in England, not only among the reading public, but also on the stage, for it appears certain that six or seven years be-

fore Shakspeare, in 1589, an English poet named Thomas Kyd had already written a tragedy on the subject of Hamlet. This is the text of the historical romance out of which, as a sculptor chisels a statue from a block of marble, Shakspeare modeled his drama.

“Fengon, having secretly assembled certain men, and perceiving himself strong enough to execute his enterprise, Horvendile, his brother, being at a banquet with his friends, suddenly set upon him, where he slew him as traitorously as cunningly he purged himself of so detestable a murder to his subjects; for that before he had any violent or bloody hands, or once committed parricide upon his brother, he had incestuously abused his wife, whose honor he ought to have sought and procured, as traitorously he pursued and effected his destruction. * * *

“Boldened and encouraged by his impunity, Fengon ventured to couple himself in marriage with her whom he used as his concubine during good Horvendile’s life, * * * and the unfortunate and wicked woman, that had received the honor to be the wife of one of the valiantest and wisest princes of the North, imbasd herself in such vile sort as to falsify her faith unto him, and, which is worse, to marry him that had been the tyrannous murderer of her lawful husband. * * *

“Geruth having so much forgotten herself, the prince Hamlet perceiving himself to be in danger of his life, as being abandoned of his own mother, to beguile the tyrant in his subtleties, counterfeited the madman with such craft and subtle practices that he made show as if he had utterly lost his wits; and under that vail he covered his pretense, and defended his life from the treasons and practices of the tyrant his uncle. For every day being in the queen’s palace (who as then was more careful to please

her whoremaster, than ready to revenge the cruel death of her husband, or to restore her son to his inheritance), he rent and tore his clothes, wallowing and lying in the dirt and mire, running through the streets like a man distraught, not speaking one word, but such as seemed to proceed of madness and mere frenzy ; all his actions and gestures being no other than the right countenances of a man wholly deprived of all reason and understanding, in such sort, that as then he seemed fit for nothing but to make sport to the pages and ruffling courtiers that attended in the court of his uncle and father-in-law. But many times he did divers actions of great and deep consideration, and often made such and so fit answers, that a wise man would soon have judged from what spirit so fine an invention might proceed. * * *

“Hamblet likewise had intelligence in what danger he was like to fall, if by any means he seemed to obey, or once like the wanton toys and vicious provocations of the gentlewoman sent to him by his uncle ; which much abashed the prince, as then wholly being in affection to the lady ; but by her he was likewise informed of the treason, as being one that from her infancy loved and favored him, and would have been exceeding sorrowful for his misfortune. * * *

“Among the friends of Fengon, there was one that, above all the rest, doubted of Hamblet's practices in counterfeiting the madman. His device to entrap Hamblet in his subtleties was thus—that King Fengon should make as though he were to go some long voyage concerning affairs of great importance, and that in the mean time Hamblet should be shut up alone in a chamber with his mother, wherein some other should secretly be hidden behind the hangings, there to stand and hear their speeches, and the

complots by them to be taken concerning the accomplishment of the dissembling fool's pretense; * * * and withal offered himself to be the man that should stand to hearken and bear witness of Hamlet's speeches with his mother. This invention pleased the king exceeding well. * * *

"Meantime, the counselor entered secretly into the queen's chamber, and there hid himself behind the arras, not long before the queen and Hamlet came thither, who, being crafty and politic, as soon as he was within the chamber, doubting some treason, used his ordinary manner of dissimulation, and began to come like a cock, beating with his arms (in such manner as cocks use to strike with their wings) upon the hangings of the chamber; whereby, feeling something stirring under them, he cried, "A rat! a rat!" and presently drawing his sword, thrust it into the hangings, which done, he pulled the counselor, half dead, out by the heels, and made an end of killing him. * * * By which means having discovered the ambush, and given the inventor thereof his just reward, he came again to his mother, who in the mean time wept and tormented herself; and having once again searched every corner of the chamber, perceiving himself to be alone with her, he began in sober and discreet manner to speak unto her, saying,

"What treason is this, O most infamous woman of all that ever prostrated themselves to the will of an abominable whoremonger, who, under the vail of a dissembling creature, covereth the most wicked and detestable crime that man could ever imagine or was committed? Now may I be assured to trust you, that like a vile wanton adulteress, altogether impudent and given over to her pleasure, runs spreading forth her arms to embrace the traitorous villainous tyrant that murdered my father, and most

incestuously receivest the villain into the lawful bed of your loyal spouse? * * * O, Queen Geruth! it is licentiousness only that has made you deface out of your mind the memory of the valor and virtues of the good king, your husband and my father. * * * Be not offended, I pray you, madam, if, transported with dolor and grief, I speak so boldly unto you, and that I respect you less than duty requireth; for you, having forgotten me, and wholly rejected the memory of the deceased king my father, must not be ashamed if I also surpass the bounds and limits of due consideration. * * *

“ Although the Queen perceived herself nearly touched, and that Hamblet moved her to the quick, where she felt herself interested; nevertheless she forgot all disdain and wrath, which thereby she might as then have had, hearing herself so sharply chidden and reprovèd, to behold the gallant spirit of her son, and to think what she might hope, and the easier expect of his so great policy and wisdom. But on the one side, she durst not lift up her eyes to behold him, remembering her offense, and on the other side, she would gladly have embraced her son, in regard of the wise admonitions by him given unto her, which as then quenched the flames of unbridled desire that before had moved her. * * *

“ After this, Fengon came to the court again, and determined that Hamblet should be sent into England. Now to bear him company were assigned two of Fengon's faithful ministers, bearing letters engraved in wood, that contained Hamblet's death, in such sort as he had advertised the King of England. But the subtle Danish prince, while his companions slept, having read the letters, and known his uncle's great treason, with the wicked and villainous minds of the two courtiers that led him to the slaughter

erased out the letters that concerned his death, and instead thereof graved others, with commission to the King of England to hang his two companions. * * *

“Hamblet, while his father lived, had been instructed in that devilish art, whereby the wicked spirit abuseth mankind, and adviseth him of things past. It toucheth not the matter herein to discover whether this prince, by reason of his over great melancholy, had received those impressions, divining that which never any but himself had before declared. * * *”*

It was evidently Hamlet who, in this narrative, struck and allured the imagination of Shakspeare. This young prince, mad from calculation, and perhaps slightly mad by nature; cunning and melancholy; burning to avenge the death of his father, and skillful in defending his own life; adored by the young girl sent to work his ruin; an object of dread, and yet of tenderness, to his guilty mother; and, until the moment of throwing off the mask, hidden and incomprehensible to both: this personage, full of passion, danger, and mystery, well versed in the occult sciences, and whom, perhaps, “by reason of his over great melancholy, the wicked spirit enabled to divine that which never any but himself had before declared;” what an admirable character was this for Shakspeare, that curious and deep-searching observer of the secret agitations of the human soul and destiny! Had he done nothing more than depict, with the bold outline and brilliant coloring of his pencil, this character and situation as delineated in the chronicle, he would assuredly have produced a masterpiece.

But Shakspeare did much more than this: under his

* See “The Hystorie of Hamblet,” in Payne Collier’s “Shakspeare’s Library,” vol. i. London, 1843.

treatment, Hamlet's madness becomes something altogether different from the obstinate premeditation or melancholy enthusiasm of a young prince of the Middle Ages, placed in a dangerous position, and engaged in a dark design ; it is a grave moral condition, a great malady of soul which, at certain epochs and in certain states of society and of manners, diffuses itself among mankind, frequently attacks the most highly gifted and the noblest of our species, and afflicts them with a disturbance of mind which sometimes borders very closely upon madness. The world is full of evil, and of all kinds of evil. What sufferings, crimes, and fatal, although innocent errors ! What general and private iniquities, both strikingly apparent and utterly unknown ! What merits, either stifled or neglected, become lost to the public, and a burden to their possessors ! What falsehood, and coldness, and levity, and ingratitude, and forgetfulness, abound in the relations and feelings of men ! Life is so short, and yet so agitated—sometimes so burdensome, and sometimes so empty ! The future is so obscure ! so much darkness at the end of so many trials ! In reference to those who only see this phase of the world and of human destiny, it is easy to understand why their mind becomes disturbed, why their heart fails them, and why a misanthropic melancholy becomes an habitual feeling which plunges them by turns into irritation or doubt—into ironical contempt or utter prostration.

This was assuredly not the disease of the times in which the chronicle represents Hamlet to have lived, nor indeed of the age in which Shakspeare himself flourished. The Middle Ages and the sixteenth century were epochs too active and too rude to give ready admittance to these bitter contemplations and unhealthy developments of hu-

man sensibility. They belong much rather to times of luxurious life, and of moral excitement at once keen and leisurely, when souls are roused from their repose, and deprived of every strong and obligatory occupation. It is then that arise these meditative discontents, these partial and irritated impressions, this entire forgetfulness of all that is good, this passionate susceptibility to all that is evil in the condition of man, and all this pedantic wrath of man against the laws and order of the universe.

That painful uneasiness and profound disturbance which are introduced into the soul by so gloomy and false an appreciation of things in general, and of man himself—which he never met with in his own time, or in those times with the history of which he was acquainted—Shakspeare divined, and constructed from them the figure and character of Hamlet. Read once again the four great monologues in which the Prince of Denmark abandons himself to the reflective expression of his inmost feelings; gather together from the whole play the passages in which he casually gives them utterance; seek out and sum up that which is manifest, and that which is hidden in all that he thinks and says, and you will every where recognize the presence of the moral malady which I have just described. Therein truly resides, much more than in his personal griefs and perils, the source of Hamlet's melancholy; in this consists his fixed idea and his madness.

And with the admirable good sense of genius, in order to render the exhibition of so sombre a disease not only endurable, but attractive, Shakspeare has endowed the sufferer himself with the gentlest and most alluring qualities. He has made Hamlet handsome, popular, generous, affectionate, and even tender. He was desirous that the instinctive character of his here should in some sort re

deem human nature from the distrust and anathemas with which it was laden by his philosophic melancholy.

But, at the same time, guided by that instinct of harmony which never deserts the true poet, Shakspeare has diffused over the whole drama the same gloomy color which opens the scene ; the spectre of the assassinated monarch gives its impress to the movement of the drama from its very outset, and leads it onward to its termination, and when that term arrives, death reigns once more ; all die, the innocent as well as the guilty, the young girl as well as the prince, and she more mad than he is ; all depart to join the spectre who had left the tomb only that he might drag them all with him on his return. The whole circumstance is as mournful as Hamlet's thoughts. None are left upon the stage but the Norwegian strangers, who then appear for the first time, and who have previously taken no part in the action.

After this great moral painting comes the second of Shakspeare's superior beauties, dramatic effect. This is nowhere more complete and more striking than in "Hamlet," for the two conditions of great dramatic effect are found in it, unity in variety—one sole, constant, and dominant impression ; and this impression varied according to the character, the turn of mind, and the condition of the different personages in whom it is developed. Death hovers over the whole drama ; the spectre of the murdered king represents and personifies it ; he is always there, sometimes present himself, sometimes present to the thoughts, and in the language of the other personages. Whether great or small, innocent or guilty, interested or indifferent to his history, they are all constantly concerned about him ; some with remorse, others with affection and grief, others again merely with curiosity, and some ever

without curiosity, and simply by chance: for example, that rude grave-digger, who says that he entered on his trade on the day on which the late king had gained a great victory over his neighbor, the King of Norway, and who, while digging the grave of the beautiful Ophelia, the mad mistress of the madman Hamlet, turns up the skull of poor Yorick, the jester of the deceased monarch—the skull of the jester of that spectre, who issues at every moment from his tomb to alarm the living and enforce the punishment of his assassin. All these personages, in the midst of all these circumstances, are brought forward, withdrawn, and introduced again by turns, each with his own peculiar physiognomy, language, and impression; and all ceaselessly concur to maintain, diffuse, and strengthen the sole, general impression of death—of death, just or unjust, natural or violent, forgotten or lamented, but always present—which is the supreme law, and should be the permanent thought of all men.

On the stage, before a large and mingled crowd of spectators, the effect of this drama, at once so gloomy and so animated, is irresistible; the soul is stirred to its lowest depths, at the same time that the imagination and senses are occupied and carried away by a continuous and rapid external movement. Herein is displayed the two-fold genius of Shakspeare, equally inexhaustible as a philosopher and as a poet; by turns a moralist and a machinist; as skillful in filling the stage with uproarious movement, as in penetrating and bringing to light the inmost secrets of the human heart. Subjected to the immediate action of such a power, men *en masse* require nothing beyond that which it gives them; it holds them under its dominion, and carries by assault their sympathy and their admiration. Fastidious and delicate minds, which judge almost

at the same moment that they feel, and carry the necessity for perfection even into their liveliest pleasures, have an immense taste and admiration for Shakspeare also ; but they are disagreeably disturbed in their admiration and enjoyment, sometimes by the accumulation and confusion of useless personages and interests, sometimes by long and subtle developments of a reflection or an idea which it would be proper for the personage to indicate *en passant*, but in which the poet takes pleasure, and so pauses for his own gratification ; but more frequently still by that fantastic mixture of coarseness and refinement of language which sometimes imparts factitious and pedantic forms even to the truest feelings, and a barbarous physiognomy to the noblest inspirations of philosophy or poetry. These defects abound in "Hamlet." I will neither give myself the painful satisfaction of proving this assertion, nor will I omit to state it. In point of genius, Shakspeare has perhaps no rivals ; but in the high and pure regions of art, he can not be taken as a model.

KING LEAR.

(1605.)

IN the year of the world 3105, say the chronicles, "at what time Joas ruled in Judah, Leir the son of Baldud was admitted ruler over the Britons." He was a wise and powerful prince, who maintained his country and subjects in a state of great prosperity, and founded the town of Caerleir, now called Leicester. He had three daughters, Gonerilla, Regan, and Cordelia, "which daughters he greatly loved, but specially Cordelia, the youngest, far above the two elder." Having attained a great age, and becoming enfeebled both in body and mind, "he thought to understand the affections of his daughters toward him, and prefer her whom he best loved to the succession over the kingdom. Whereupon he first asked Gonerilla, the eldest, how well she loved him; who, calling her gods to record, protested that she loved him more than her own life, which by right and reason should be most dear to her. With which answer the father, being well pleased, turned to the second, and demanded of her how well she loved him, who answered (confirming her sayings with great oaths) that she loved him more than tongue could express, and far above all other creatures of the world." When he put the same question to Cordelia, she answered, "Knowing the great love and fatherly zeal that you have

always borne toward me (for the which I may not answer you otherwise than I think, and as my conscience leadeth me), I protest unto you that I have loved you ever, and will continually (while I live) love you as my natural father. And if you would more understand of the love that I bear you, ascertain yourself, that so much as you have, so much you are worth, and so much I love you, and no more." Her father, displeased with this answer, married his two eldest daughters, one to Hennisus, duke of Cornwall, and the other to Maglanus, duke of Albany, "betwixt whom he willed and ordained that his land should be divided after his death, and the one half thereof immediately should be assigned to them in hand; but for the third daughter, Cordelia, he reserved nothing."

It happened, however, that Aganippus, one of the twelve kings who then governed Gaul, heard of the beauty and merit of this princess, and desired to have her in marriage. He was told that she had no dowry, as every thing had been bestowed on her two sisters; but Aganippus persisted in his request, obtained Cordelia's hand, and carried her in triumph to his kingdom.

Meanwhile, Leir's two sons-in-law, beginning to think he was reigning too long, seized violently upon the land which he had reserved for himself, and assigned him only a sufficient income to live and maintain his rank. Even this allowance was gradually diminished; but what caused Leir most pain was the extreme unkindness of his daughters, who "seemed to think that all was too much which their father had, the same being never so little; insomuch that, going from one to the other, he was brought to that misery that scarcely they would allow him one servant to wait upon him." The old king, in despair, fled from the country, and took refuge in Gaul, where Cordelia and her

husband received him with great honors, and raised an army and equipped a fleet to restore him to his possessions, the succession of which he promised to bequeath to Cordelia, who accompanied her father and husband on this expedition. The two dukes having been slain, and their armies defeated, in a battle fought with Aganippus, Leir reascended his throne, and died two years afterward, forty years after his first accession. Cordelia succeeded him, and reigned five years; but in the mean while, her husband having died, her nephews, Margan and Cunedag, rebelled against her, conquered her, and cast her into prison, where, "being a woman of a manly courage, and despairing to recover liberty," she committed suicide.*

This story is borrowed by Holinshed from Geoffrey of Monmouth, who probably constructed the history of Leir from an anecdote of Ina, king of the Saxons, and the answer of the "youngest and wisest of the daughters" of that king, who, under circumstances similar to those in which Cordelia was placed, gave a similar answer to her father, that, although she loved, honored, and revered him in the highest degree that nature and filial duty could require, yet she thought it might one day happen that she would more ardently love her husband, with whom, by the command of God, she was to constitute one flesh, and for whom she might leave father and mother. It does not appear that Ina disapproved of the "wise speech" of his daughter; and the sequel of Cordelia's history is probably a development added by the imagination of the chroniclers to this primary fact. However this may be, the anger and misfortunes of King Lear had, before Shakspeare's time, found a place in several poems, as well as formed the subject of one drama and several ballads. In

* Holinshed's Chronicle, History of England, book ii., chaps. 5, 6.

one of these ballads, mentioned by Johnson, under the title of "A lamentable Song of the Death of King Leir and his three Daughters," Lear, as in the tragedy, goes mad, and Cordelia, having been killed in the battle gained by the troops of the King of France, her father dies of grief upon her body, and her sisters are condemned to death by the judgment of the "lords and nobles of the kingdom." Whether the ballad preceded Shakspeare's tragedy or not, it is very probable that the author of the ballad and the dramatic poet derived their facts from the same source, and that it was not without some authority that Shakspeare, in his *dénouement*, departed from the chronicles, which give the victory to Cordelia. This *dénouement* was changed by Tate, and Cordelia restored to her rights. The play remained on the stage in this second form, to the great satisfaction of Johnson, and, says Mr. Steevens, of "the upper gallery." Addison, however, pronounced against this change.

As to the episode of the Earl of Gloster, Shakspeare has imitated it from the adventure of a king of Paphlagonia, related in Sidney's "Arcadia;" only, in the original narrative, the bastard himself deprives his father of sight, and reduces him to a condition similar to that of Lear. Leonatus, the legitimate son, who, having been condemned to death, had been obliged to seek service in a foreign army, on learning the misfortunes of his father, leaves all at the moment when his merits were about to gain him a high rank, in order to hasten, at the risk of his life, to share and succor the misery of the old king. The latter, restored to his throne by the aid of his friends, dies of joy on crowning his son Leonatus; and the bastard Plexirtus, by a feigned repentance, succeeds in disarming the anger of his brother.

It is evident that the situation of King Lear and of the King of Paphlagonia, both persecuted by the children whom they preferred, and succored by the one whom they rejected, struck Shakspeare as fitted to enter into the same subject, because they belonged to the same idea. Those who have blamed him for having thus injured the simplicity of his action have given their opinion according to their own system, without taking the trouble to examine that of the author whom they criticised. Starting even from the rules which they are desirous to impose, we might answer that the love of the two women for Edmund, which serves to effect their punishment, and the intervention of Edgar at this part of the *dénouement*, are sufficient to acquit the play of the charge of duplicity of action; for, provided that all the threads at last unite in one knot which it is easy to seize, the simplicity of the progress of an action depends much less upon the number of the interests and personages concerned in it than upon the natural and clearly visible play of the springs which set it in motion. But further, we must never forget that unity, in Shakspeare's view, consists in one dominant idea, which, reproducing itself under various forms, incessantly produces, continues, and redoubles the same impression. Thus as, in "Macbeth," the poet displays man in conflict with the passions of crime, so in "King Lear" he depicts him in conflict with misfortune, the action of which is modified according to the different characters of the individuals who experience it. The first spectacle which he brings under our notice is the misfortune of virtue, or of persecuted innocence, as exemplified in Cordelia, Kent, and Edgar. Then comes the misfortune of those who, by their passion or blindness, have rendered themselves the tools of injustice, namely, Lear and Gloster; and upon these the effort

of compassion is directed. As for the wicked personages, we do not witness their sufferings; the sight of their misfortune would be disturbed by the remembrance of their criminality; they can have no punishment but death.

Of the five personages subjected to the action of misfortune, Cordelia, a heavenly figure, hovers almost invisible and half-veiled over the composition, which she fills with her presence, although she is almost always absent from it. She suffers, but never complains, never defends herself: she acts, but her action is manifested only by its results; serene regarding her own fate, reserved and restrained even in her most legitimate feelings, she passes and disappears like a denizen of a better world, who has traversed this world of ours without experiencing any mere earthly emotion.

Kent and Edgar each have a very decided physiognomy; the first of them is, like Cordelia, a victim to his duty; the second interests us at first only by his innocence. Having entered upon misfortune at the same time, so to speak, that he entered into life, and equally new to both conditions, Edgar gradually develops his faculties, learns their character at once, and discovers within himself, as need requires, the qualities with which he is gifted; in proportion as he advances, his duties, and his difficulties, and his importance increase; he grows up and becomes a man, but, at the same time, he learns how costly is this growth; and he finally discovers, when bearing it with nobleness and courage, the whole weight of that burden which he had hitherto borne almost with gayety. Kent, on the contrary, a wise and firm old man, has known all and foreseen all from the very outset; as soon as he enters upon action, his march is determined and his object defined. He is not, like Edgar, urged by necessity or

met by chance ; his will determines his conduct ; nothing can change or disturb it ; and the aspect of the misfortune to which he devotes himself, scarcely wrings from him an exclamation of grief or pain.

Lear and Gloster, in an analogous situation, receive from it an impression which corresponds to their different characters. Lear, impetuous and irritable, spoiled by power and by the habit and need of admiration, rebels both against his position and against his own conviction ; he can not believe in what he knows ; his reason offers no resistance ; and he becomes mad. Gloster, naturally weak, yields to his misery, and is equally incapable of resistance to his joy ; he dies on recognizing Edgar. If Cordelia were alive, Lear would still find strength to live ; but he breaks down by the effort of his grief.

Amid all this confusion of incidents and coarseness of manners, interest and pathos have never, perhaps, been carried further than in this tragedy. The time in which Shakspeare laid his action seems to have emancipated him from all conventional forms ; and just as he felt no difficulty in placing a King of France, a Duke of Albany, and a Duke of Cornwall, eight hundred years before the Christian era, so he felt no necessity for connecting the language and the characters of his drama with any determinate period. The only trace of intention which can be remarked in the general color of the style of the drama is the vagueness and uncertainty of the grammatical constructions, which seem to belong to a language still quite in its infancy ; at the same time, a considerable number of expressions which bear a close resemblance to the French language, indicate an epoch, if not correspondent with that in which King Lear is supposed to have lived, at least far anterior to that at which Shakspeare wrote

MACBETH.

(1606.)

IN the year 1034, Duncan succeeded his grandfather, Malcolm, on the throne of Scotland. He held his right of his mother, Beatrice, the eldest daughter of Malcolm; the younger daughter, Doda, was the mother of Macbeth, who was thus cousin-german to Duncan. The father of Macbeth was Finleg, thane of Glamis, mentioned under the name of Sinel in the tragedy, and in the chronicle of Holinshed, on the authority of Hector Boëtius, from whom the narrative of the events concerning Duncan and Macbeth is borrowed. As Shakspeare has followed Holinshed's chronicle with the utmost exactness, it becomes necessary to give the facts as therein related; and they are, moreover, in themselves replete with interest.

Macbeth had rendered himself celebrated by his bravery, and "if he had not been somewhat cruel of nature," says the chronicle, "he might have been thought most worthy of the government of a realm." Duncan, on the other hand, was an unwarlike prince, and carried his gentleness and kindness to excess; so that if it had been possible to fuse the characters of the two cousins together, and to temper the one by the other, the people would have had, says the chronicle, "an excellent captain, and a worthy king."

After some years of peaceful dominion, the weakness of Duncan having encouraged malefactors, Banquo, the thane of Lochaber, "as he gathered the finances due to the king," found himself compelled to punish "somewhat sharply" several notorious offenders, which occasioned a revolt. Banquo was robbed of all the money he had collected, and "had much ado to get away with life, after he had received sundry grievous wounds." As soon as he had recovered of his hurts, he proceeded to court to lay his complaints before Duncan, and at last persuaded the king to summon the rebels to appear before him; but they slew the sergeant-at-arms, who had been sent with the royal mandate, and prepared for defense, at the instigation of Macdowald, one of their most important chieftains, who, collecting his clansmen and friends around him, represented Duncan to them as a "faint-hearted milksop, more meet to govern a set of idle monks in some cloister, than to have the rule of such valiant and hardy men of war as the Scots were." The revolt spread particularly throughout the Western Isles, from whence a host of warriors came to join Macdowald at Lochaber; and the hope of plunder attracted from Ireland a large number of Kernes and Galloglasses,* ready to follow Macdowald whithersoever it should please him to lead them. By means of these re-enforcements, Macdowald defeated the troops which the king had sent to oppose him, took prisoner their leader, Malcolm, and beheaded him after the battle.

Duncan, in consternation at this news, assembled his council, at which Macbeth, after having blamed the king severely for his lenity and slackness in punishing the of-

* The Kernes were a species of light infantry, and the Galloglasses heavy-armed foot-soldiers.

fenders, which had given them time to collect an army, offered to undertake the conduct of the war in concert with Banquo. His offer was gladly accepted, and the mere report of his approach with fresh troops struck such terror into the rebels, that a great number of them secretly deserted; and Macdowald, having tried to make head against Macbeth with the remainder, was utterly routed, and forced to fly to a castle in which he had placed his wife and children; but, despairing of being able to hold out, and fearing the cruelties of his opponents, he killed himself, after having first put his wife and children to death. Macbeth entered without obstacle into the castle, the gates of which had been left open. He found only the body of Macdowald in the midst of his murdered family; and the barbarism of that rude age was revolted by the fact that, unmoved by this tragic spectacle, Macbeth cut off Macdowald's head, and sent it to the king, and hanged the body upon a gallows. He made the inhabitants of the isles purchase the pardon of their revolt at a very high price, which did not, however, prevent him from putting to execution all those whom he could find in Lochaber. The inhabitants exclaimed loudly against this violation of his pledge, and the reproaches which they heaped upon him irritated Macbeth to such a degree that he was on the point of crossing over to the isles with an army to take vengeance upon them; but he was dissuaded from this project by the counsels of his friends, and more particularly by the presents with which the islanders a second time purchased their pardon.

A short time afterward, Sweno, king of Norway, having made a descent upon Scotland, Duncan, to resist him, placed himself at the head of the largest portion of his army, and intrusted the rest to the command of Macbeth

and Banquo. Duncan was defeated and put to flight; and he took refuge in the castle of Perth, in which he was besieged by Sweno. Duncan, having secretly informed Macbeth of his intentions, feigned a desire to surrender, and protracted the negotiation, until at last, having learned that Macbeth had collected a sufficient force, he appointed a day for giving up the fortress; and, meanwhile, he offered to send the Norwegians a supply of provisions, which they accepted all the more eagerly because they had suffered greatly from famine for several days. The bread and ale with which he furnished them had been adulterated with the juice of an extremely narcotic berry, so that, having eaten and drank greedily, they fell into "a fast dead sleep, that in manner it was impossible to awake them." Then Duncan sent word to Macbeth, who arriving in all haste, and entering without opposition into the camp, massacred almost all the Norwegians, most of whom never stirred, while the others were rendered so dizzy by the effects of the narcotic that they could make no defense. A large number of sailors from the Norwegian fleet, who had come to share in the abundance which prevailed in the camp, shared also in the fate of their fellow-countrymen; and Sweno, who escaped with ten others from this butchery, could scarcely find enough mariners to man the ship in which he fled to Norway. Those vessels which he left behind were, three days afterward, so tossed by an east wind, "that, beating and rushing one against another, they sank there," at a place called Drownelow Sands, where they lie "even unto these days (1574), to the great danger of other such ships as come on that coast; for, being covered with the flood when the tide cometh, at the ebbing again of the same some parts of them appear above water."

This disaster caused such consternation in Norway, that, for many years afterward, no knights were made until they had sworn to avenge their countrymen who had thus been slaughtered in Scotland. Duncan, in celebration of his deliverance, ordered solemn processions to be made throughout the realm; but while these thanksgivings were in progress, he was informed of the disembarkation of an army of Danes, under the command of Canute, king of England, who had come to avenge the defeat of his brother Sweno. Macbeth and Banquo hastened to meet them, defeated them in a pitched battle, and forced them to re-embark, and to pay a considerable sum for permission to bury their dead at St. Colm's Inch, where, says the chronicle, "many old sepulchres are yet to be seen graven with the arms of the Danes."

Such are the exploits of Macbeth and Banquo, of which Shakspeare, following Holinshed, has made use in his tragedy. A short time afterward, Macbeth and Banquo were traveling to Forres, where the king then lay, "and went sporting by the way together, without other company save only themselves," when they were suddenly accosted by three women "in strange and wild apparel, resembling creatures of the elder world," who saluted Macbeth precisely as it is related in the tragedy. Upon this, Banquo said, "What manner of women are you that seem so little favorable unto me, whereas, to my fellow here, besides high offices, ye assign also the kingdom, appointing forth nothing for me at all?" "Yes," saith the first of them, "we promise greater benefits unto thee than unto him, for he shall reign, indeed, but with an unlucky end; neither shall he leave any issue behind him to succeed in his place; whereas, contrarily, thou indeed shalt not reign at all, but of thee those shall be born who shall

govern the Scottish kingdoms by long order of continual descent." Herewith the women immediately disappeared. Soon afterward, the thane of Cawdor having been put to death for treason, his title was conferred upon Macbeth, who now began, as well as Banquo, to place great faith in the predictions of the witches, and to devise means for obtaining the crown.

He had a good chance of succeeding legitimately to the throne, for Duncan's sons were not yet of age to reign, and the law of Scotland ordained that, if the king died before his sons or direct descendants were old enough to undertake the management of affairs, the nearest relative of the deceased king should be elected in their stead. But Duncan having appointed his son Malcolm, while still under age, Prince of Cumberland and successor to the throne, Macbeth, who saw his hopes destroyed by this proceeding, thought himself entitled to take revenge for the injustice he had experienced. To this, moreover, he was incessantly stimulated by his wife, Guach, who, burning with desire to bear the name of queen, and being, says Boëtius, "like all women, impatient of delay," continually reproached him with his want of courage. Macbeth, therefore, having assembled a large number of his friends at Inverness, or, as some say, at Botgosuane, communicated to them his design, killed Duncan, and repaired with his party to Scone, where he obtained possession of the crown without difficulty.

Holinshed's chronicle relates the murder of Duncan without any detail. The incidents which Shakspeare has interwoven into his drama are taken from another part of the same chronicle concerning the murder of King Duff, who had been assassinated more than sixty years before by a Scottish lord named Donwald. The follow-

ing are the circumstances of this murder, as related in the chronicle :

Duff had shown himself, from the commencement of his reign, very anxious to protect the people against malefactors, and "idle persons who sought to live only upon other men's goods." He put several to death, and compelled others to withdraw to Ireland, or else to learn "some manual occupation wherewith to get their living." Although, as it would appear, these fellows were connected only in a very remote degree with the high nobility of Scotland, the nobles, says the chronicle, "were much offended with this extreme rigor, accounting it a great dishonor for such as were descended of noble parentage to be constrained to get their living with the labor of their hands, which only appertained to plowmen, and such others of the base degree as were born to travail for the maintenance of the nobility, and to serve at their commandment." The king was consequently regarded by them as an enemy of the nobles, and unworthy to govern them, as he was, they said, devoted solely to the interests of the people and clergy, who at that time made common cause against the oppression of the great lords. The discontent increased daily, and several rebellions arose, in one of which some young gentlemen engaged, who were relatives of Donwald, the king's lieutenant of the castle of Forres. These young men were taken prisoners, and Donwald, who until then had faithfully and usefully served the king, hoped to obtain their pardon; but not succeeding in his attempt, he was filled with resentment. His wife, who was irritated against the king from a similar cause, spared no efforts to increase his anger, and reminded him how easy it would be to take his revenge when Duff came, as frequently happened, to reside at

Forres without any other guard than the garrison of the castle, which was entirely devoted to them ; and "she showed him the means whereby he might soonest accomplish it."

Duff came to Forres a short time afterward, and, on the evening before his departure, when he had gone to bed, after spending a longer time than usual at prayers in his oratory, Donwald and his wife sat down to table with the two chamberlains, whose "reare-supper or collation" they had carefully prepared, and feasted them so well that they fell into a lethargic sleep. Then Donwald, "though he abhorred the act greatly in heart," at the instigation of his wife, summoned four of his servants who were aware of his plot, and whom he had gained over by presents. These entered the king's chamber, killed him, carried his body out of the castle by a postern-gate, and, placing it on a horse which they had provided for the purpose, conveyed it to a place about two miles distant from the castle. Having got some laborers to help them to turn the course of a little river that ran through the fields, they dug a deep hole in the channel and buried the body in it, "ramming it up with stones and gravel so closely, that, setting the water in the right course again, no man could perceive that any thing had been newly digged there. This they did by order of Donwald, that the body should not be found, and by bleeding, when Donwald was present, declare him to be guilty of the murder." Donwald, in the mean while, was careful to be one of those who kept guard, and did not leave his post during the whole night. The subsequent circumstances relative to the murder of the two chamberlains are exactly as Shakspeare has represented them in "Macbeth ;" and the same may be said of the prodigies which he relates, and which took place

at the death of Duff. The sun did not appear for six months, until at last, the murderers having been discovered and executed, it shone forth again upon the earth, and the fields became covered with flowers, "clean contrary to the time and season of the year."

To return to Macbeth. The first ten years of his reign were marked by a wise, equitable, and vigorous government. Several of his laws have been preserved, of which the following are specimens :

"He that attendeth any man to the church, market, or to any other public assembly, as a retainer, shall suffer death, except he have living at his hands, on whom he so attendeth." The punishment of death was also decreed against all who became sworn retainers of any other person than the king.

"All manner of lords and great barons shall not contract matrimony with other, under pain of death, specially if their lands and rooms be near together."

"All armor and weapon borne to other effect than in defense of the king and realm in time of wars, shall be confiscated to the king's use, with all other movable goods of the party that herein offendeth." It was also enacted that "a horse kept by any of the commons or husbandmen to any other use than for tillage and laboring of the earth shall be forfeited to the king by escheat."

"Such as be appointed governors or (as I may call them) captains, that buy within those limits where their charges lie any lands or possessions, shall lose both lands and possessions, and the money which they have paid for the same. And if any of the said captains or governors marry their sons or daughters unto any manner of person that dwelleth within the bounds of their rooms, they shall lose their office ; neither shall it be lawful for any of their sons or copartners to occupy the same office."

"No man shall sit as judge in any temporal court without the king's commission authorizing him thereto. All conventions, offices, and acts of justice shall pass in the king's name."

Other laws are intended to assure the immunity of the clergy and the authority of the censures of the Church, to regulate the duties of knighthood, the succession of property, and so forth. Several of these laws, some of which are rather singular for the time, were passed from motives of order and regularity; others were destined to maintain civil independence against the oppressive power of the officers of the crown; but most of them are evidently intended to diminish the power of the nobles, and to concentrate all authority in the hands of the king. All are mentioned by the historians of the period as wise and beneficent laws; and if Macbeth had obtained the throne by legitimate means, and had continued in the ways of justice as he began, he might, says Holinshed, "have been numbered among the most noble princes that any where had reigned."

"But this," continues our chronicle, "was but a counterfeited zeal of equity showed by him against his natural inclination." Macbeth appeared at length in his true colors, and the same feeling of his position which had led him to seek public favor by justice changed justice into cruelty; "for the prick of conscience caused him ever to fear lest he should be served of the same cup as he had ministered to his predecessor." Now begins the Macbeth of the tragedy. The murder of Banquo, executed in the same manner and for the same reasons as those which Shakspeare ascribes to him, was followed by a great number of other crimes, so that "at length he found such sweetness by putting his nobles thus to death, that his

earnest thirst after blood in this behalf might in no wise be satisfied." Certain wizards, in whom he placed great trust, had warned him to beware of Macduff, whose power, moreover, gave him great umbrage, and he only sought a pretext for giving vent to his hatred of him. Macduff, informed of his danger, passed over into England to invite Malcolm, who had taken refuge in that country, to return to claim his rights. Macbeth became acquainted with this plot, "for kings," says the chronicle, "have sharp sight like unto lynx, and long ears like unto Midas;" and Macbeth maintained spies in the houses of all the nobles of his realm. The flight of Macduff, the massacre of all his family, and his conversation with Malcolm, are all facts taken from the chronicle. Malcolm at first met Macduff's entreaties with objections based upon his own incontinence, and Macduff replied as in Shakspeare, with this addition only, "Make thyself king, and I shall convey the matter so wisely that thou shalt be so satisfied at thy pleasure in such secret wise that no man shall be aware thereof." The remainder of the scene is faithfully imitated by the poet; and all that concerns the death of Macbeth, the predictions that had been made to him, and the manner in which they were at once eluded and accomplished, is taken almost word for word from the chronicle, in which we see at last how, "by illusion of the devil, he defamed, with most terrible cruelty, his reign, which in the beginning was very profitable to the commonwealth." Macbeth had assassinated Duncan in the year 1040, and he was himself killed in 1057, after a reign of seventeen years.*

* Holinshed's Chronicle, "History of Scotland," vol. i., p. 168-176. The story of the murder of King Duff is contained in p. 150, 151. It was probably of the facts furnished by Hector Boëtius to this chronicle

Such is a general view of the facts to which Shakspeare undertook to impart a soul and life. He places himself simply in the midst of the events and personages, and, setting all these inanimate things in motion with a breath, he enables us to witness the spectacle of their existence. Far from adding any thing to the incidents furnished him by the narrative from which he has borrowed his subject, he omits many things; he is especially careful to lop off every thing that might injure the simplicity of his progress, and embarrass the action of his personages; and he suppresses every thing that might prevent him from fathoming them with a single glance, and portraying them with a few bold touches. Macbeth, with all the crimes and great qualities ascribed to him by his history, would be too complicated a being; it would be necessary for him to possess at once too much ambition and too much virtue for one of his dispositions to maintain itself for any time in presence of the other, and too cumbrous machinery would be required to make the balance finally incline to one or the other side. Shakspeare's Macbeth is brilliant only by his warlike virtues, and especially by his personal bravery; he has only the qualities and the defects of a barbarian; brave, but not a stranger to the fear of peril when he believes in its proximity; cruel and sensitive by fits and starts; perfidious through his inconstancy; always ready to yield to any temptation that presents itself, whether it lead to crime or to virtue—he displays, in his ambition as well as in his criminality, that character of thoughtlessness and mobility which

that Buchanan, when relating in a much more summary manner the history of Macbeth, said, "Multa hio fabulose quidam nostrorum affingunt; sed quia theatris aut Milesiis fabulis sunt aptiora quam historiarum, ea omitto."—*Rerum. Scot. Hist.*, lib. vii.

belongs to an almost savage state of civilization. His passions are imperious, but no series of reasonings and projects determines and governs them; they form a lofty tree, but one devoid of roots, which the least breeze may shake, and the fall of which is a disaster. Hence arises his tragic grandeur; it resides in his destiny more than in his character. Macbeth, if placed at a greater distance from the expectation of succession to the throne, would have remained virtuous; but his virtue would have been restless, for it would have been merely the fruit of circumstance. His crime becomes a punishment to him, because it is circumstance which has forced him to commit it; this crime did not proceed from the depths of Macbeth's nature, and yet it clings to him, envelops him, enchains him, racks him in every part, and thus creates for him a troubled and irremissible destiny, in which the unhappy victim vainly writhes, doing nothing that does not plunge him still deeper, and with increasing despair, into the career which is henceforward prescribed to him by his implacable persecutor. Macbeth is one of those characters marked out in all superstitions to become the prey and instrument of the perverse spirit who takes pleasure in destroying them, because they have received some spark of the divine nature, and who, at the same time, meets with but few difficulties in his task, for the heavenly light darts but a few fleeting rays into their souls, which are obscured by storms at every instant.

Lady Macbeth is just exactly the wife of such a man, the product of the same state of civilization, and of the same habit of passions. She adds to this, moreover, the fact that she is a woman without prudence, without generality in her views, perceiving at once only a single part of a single idea, and giving herself up to it entirely, with-

out ever admitting any thing that might distract or disturb her attention from it. The feelings which belong to her sex are not unknown to her ; she loves her husband, knows the pleasures of a mother, and could not kill Duncan herself, because he resembled "her father as he slept;" but she aspires to be queen, and for this cause Duncan must die ; she sees nothing in the death of Duncan but the pleasure of being queen ; her courage is easy, for she does not perceive any thing to make her recoil from the deed. When her passion is satisfied and the action committed, then only will the other consequences be revealed to her as a novelty of which she previously had not the slightest anticipation. Those fears, and that necessity for new crimes, which her husband had foreseen at the outset, she has never thought of. She was quite willing to throw the crime upon the two chamberlains, but it was not her idea to kill them ; she did not arrange the murder of Banquo, or the massacre of Macduff's family ; she did not see so far forward ; she had not even divined the effect which would be produced upon her by such a sight, when she entered the room in which Duncan lay dead. She leaves it in agitation, no longer contemning the terrors of her husband, but merely urging him not to dwell too much upon images, by which we see that she is beginning to feel herself besieged. The blow is struck, and will reveal itself in the admirable and terrible scene of her somnambulism : there we shall learn what becomes of a character apparently so immovable, when it is no longer sustained by the blind fury of passion. Macbeth has become hardened in crime, after having hesitated to commit it, because he knew its character ; but we shall see his wife, succumbing beneath the knowledge which she has acquired too late, substitute one fixed idea for another, die

to deliver herself from its influence, and punish, by the madness of despair, the crime which she was led to commit by the madness of ambition.

The other personages, introduced merely to fill up this great picture of the progress and destiny of crime, have no other color than that of the position given them by history. The Witches are, indeed, what they should be, and I do not know why it is the custom to exclaim with disgust against this portion of the representation of "Macbeth." When we see these vile creatures the arbiters of life and death, of all the chances and all the interests of humanity, disposing of them in accordance with the most contemptible caprices of their odious nature, to the terror which their power inspires is added the dread occasioned by their unreason, and the very absurdity of such a spectacle only augments its effect.

The style of "Macbeth" is remarkable, in its wild energy, for a refinement which we may indeed blame, but which it would be wrong to consider as contrary to truth as it is to naturalness. Refinement of language is not incompatible with rudeness of manners and ideas; it seems even to be rather common in times and positions in which general ideas are wanting. The mind, which can not remain idle, then attaches itself to the slightest verbal connections, takes delight in them, and makes a habit of them, which we meet with in all analogous positions. Nothing can be more far-fetched than the spirit of the literature of the Middle Ages; and what we know of the speech of savages contains many choice ideas. Refinement is the characteristic of the wits of the lower classes; and even the insults of the common people are sometimes composed with a quite singular fastidiousness, as if, at those times when anger excites their faculties, their mind

seized with greater facility and abundance upon relations of this kind, the only ones which it was capable of attaining.

It is believed that "Macbeth" was performed in 1606. The idea of writing a tragedy upon this subject, which would necessarily be pleasing to King James, who had just ascended the throne of England, was probably suggested to Shakspeare by a short poetical dialogue, which the students of Oxford, in 1605, recited in Latin before the king, and in English before the queen, who had accompanied him to that city. The students were three in number, and probably spoke in turn. Their speech turned upon the prediction uttered to Banquo; and, in allusion to the triple salutation which Macbeth had received, they hailed James King of England, Scotland, and Ireland. They also hailed him King of France, which destroyed, somewhat gratuitously, the virtue of the number *three*.

JULIUS CÆSAR.

(1607.)

AMONG those tragedies of Shakspeare to which public opinion has assigned a first rank, "Julius Cæsar" is the one of which the commentators have spoken most coldly. Johnson, the coldest of them all, contents himself with saying: "Of this tragedy, many particular passages deserve regard, and the contention and reconciliation of Brutus and Cassius is universally celebrated; but I have never been strongly agitated in perusing it, and think it somewhat cold and unaffecting, compared with some other of Shakspeare's plays."

It is to adopt an entirely false principle of criticism to judge Shakspeare by himself, and to compare the impressions which he has succeeded in producing, in a given style and subject, with those which he calls forth in another style and subject; as if he possessed only a special and singular merit, which he was bound to display on every occasion, and which constituted his sole title to glory. His vast and true genius must be measured on a larger scale; we must compare Shakspeare with nature, with the world; and in every particular case, the comparison must be made between that portion of the world and of nature which it was his intention to represent, and the picture which he has drawn of it. Do not expect from the painter

of Brutus the same impressions and the same effects as from the delineator of King Lear, or of Romeo and Juliet. Shakspeare penetrates to the inmost recesses of all subjects, and can derive from each the impressions which naturally flow from it, and the distinct and original effects which it ought to produce.

That, after this, the spectacle of the soul of Brutus should be, to Johnson, less touching and dramatic than the display of any particular passion, or of any particular position in life, is a result of the personal inclinations of the critic, and of the turn taken by his ideas and feelings. We can not find in it a general rule upon which we may found a comparison between works of an absolutely different kind. There are minds so constituted that Corneille will fill them with more emotions than Voltaire, and a mother will feel her nature more agitated and disturbed by *Mérope* than by *Zaire*. The mind of Johnson, more strong and upright than it was elevated, could understand tolerably well the interests and passions which agitate the middle region of life, but he never could attain to those lofty eminences in which a truly stoical soul can exist without effort or distraction. The age in which Johnson lived, moreover, was not an age of great devotements; and although, even at that epoch, the political climate of England preserved its literature in some degree from that effeminate influence which had enervated our own, it could not entirely escape from that general disposition of the national mind, that sort of moral materialism, which, granting, as it were, to the soul no other life but that which it derives from the contact of external objects, did not suppose it possible for it to be supplied with other sources of interest than the *pathetic*, properly so called—the individual sorrows of life, the anguish of the heart, and the storms

of the passions. This disposition of the eighteenth century was so powerful, that, when introducing the death of Cæsar upon our stage, Voltaire, who justly boasted that he had made a tragedy succeed without the aid of love, nevertheless did not think that such a spectacle could dispense with the pathetic interest which results from the painful conflict of duty and affection. In this great struggle of the last efforts of dying liberty against budding despotism, he sought out, and gave the first place to, an obscure and doubtful fact, but one which was adapted to furnish him with the kind of emotions of which he stood in need ; and from the position, real or fictitious, of Brutus placed between his father and his country, Voltaire has constructed the basis and lifespring of his tragedy.

Shakspeare's drama rests entirely upon the character of Brutus ; and he has even been blamed for not having entitled his work " Marcus Brutus " instead of " Julius Cæsar." But if Brutus is the hero of the play, the power and death of Cæsar form its subject. Cæsar alone occupies the foreground ; the horror felt for his power, and the necessity of deliverance from it, fill the whole of the first part of the drama ; the other half is consecrated to the recollection and consequences of his death. It is, as Antony says, *

" Cæsar's spirit ranging for revenge ; "

and, that his sway may not be lost sight of, it is still his spirit which, on the plains of Sardis and of Philippi, appears to Brutus as his evil genius.

The picture of this great catastrophe, however, finishes with the death of Brutus. Shakspeare desired to interest us in the event of his drama only as it related to Brutus, just as he has presented Brutus to us only in relation to

the event. The fact which furnishes the subject of the tragedy, and the character which accomplishes it, the death of Cæsar and the character of Brutus—this is the union which constitutes Shakspeare's dramatic work, just as the union of soul and body constitutes life, both elements being equally necessary to the existence of the individual. Before the death of Cæsar was planned, the play does not begin; after the death of Brutus, it ends.

It is, then, upon the character of Brutus, the soul of his drama, that Shakspeare has stamped the impress of his genius; and it is all the more admirable in this picture, because, while remaining faithful to history, he has made it also a work of creation, and has presented Plutarch's Brutus to us as truthfully and completely in the scenes which the poet has imagined, as in those which the historian had supplied. That dreamy spirit ever busied in self-examination, that disturbance of a stern conscience at the first indications of a duty that is still doubtful, that calm and resolute firmness as soon as the duty becomes certain, that profound and almost painful sensibility, ever restrained by the rigor of the most austere principles, that gentleness of soul which never disappears for a single moment amid the most cruel offices of virtue—in fine, the character of Brutus, as its idea is present to us all, proceeds animate and unchanging through the different scenes of life in which we meet it, and in which we can not doubt that it appeared under the very aspect with which the poet has clothed it.

Perhaps this historical fidelity may have occasioned the coldness of Shakspeare's critics regarding the tragedy of "Julius Cæsar." They could not discover in it those features of almost wild originality which strike us in the works which Shakspeare has composed upon modern sub-

jects, foreign to the actual habits of our life, as well as to the classical ideas upon which the habits of our mind have been formed. The manners of *Hotspur* are certainly more original to us than those of *Brutus*, and they are also more original in themselves. The grandeur of the characters of the Middle Ages is strongly impressed with originality; the grandeur of the ancients arises with regularity upon the basis of certain general principles, which leave no other sensible difference between individuals than the difference of elevation to which they attain. This was felt by Shakspeare; he merely thought to enhance *Brutus*, and not to make him singular. The other personages, being placed in an inferior sphere, resume somewhat of the liberty of their individual character, because they are free from that rule of perfection which duty imposes upon *Brutus*. The poet also seems to play around them with less respect, and to allow himself to ingraft upon them several forms which belong to himself rather than to them. *Cassius*, disdainfully comparing the bodily strength of *Cæsar* to his own, and running through the streets of Rome by night in the midst of the storm, to assuage the fever of dangers which devours him, bears much greater resemblance to a comrade of *Canute* or of *Harold* than to a Roman of the time of *Cæsar*; but this barbarian tint throws over the irregularities of *Cassius* an interest which would not, perhaps, arise with such liveliness from the historical resemblance. M. Schlegel, whose opinions upon Shakspeare always deserve great consideration, seems to me, however, to fall into a slight error when he remarks that "the poet has pointed out with great nicety the superiority of *Cassius* over *Brutus* in independent volition and discernment in judging of human affairs." I think, on the contrary, that Shakspeare's admirable art

consists, in this piece, in preserving to the principal personage an entire superiority, even when he is mistaken, and in making this evident by the very fact that he falls into error, and yet is deferred to, and that the reason of the others yields with confidence to the mistake of Brutus. Brutus goes so far as to do himself a wrong; in his quarrel with Cassius, overcome for a moment by terrible and secret grief, he forgets the moderation which becomes him; in fine, Brutus is wrong once, and yet Cassius humbles himself, for Brutus has in fact continued greater than he.

Cæsar's character may perhaps appear to us rather too much disfigured by that boastfulness which is common to all barbarous times in which individual force, incessantly called upon to engage in the most terrible struggles, can sustain itself only by a lofty consciousness of its own power, and even has need to be supported by the idea which others entertain of it. It was necessary to display in Cæsar the force which had subjugated the Romans, and the pride which crushed them; Shakspeare had only one position in which he could manifest this state of the soul of his hero; and he, consequently, laid the color on too thickly. Nevertheless, his Cæsar, I confess, does not appear to me more false than our own. Shakspeare even seems to me to have better preserved, in the midst of his rhodomontades, those forms of equality which the despot of a republic ever maintains toward those whom he oppresses.

The tone of "Julius Cæsar" is more generally sustained than that of most of the other tragedies of Shakspeare. Scarcely, throughout the whole of the part of Brutus, do we meet with a single vulgar image; and the only one at all open to the charge of vulgarity occurs when he gives

way to anger. The visible care which the poet has taken to imitate the laconic language which history attributes to his hero has very rarely led him into affectation, unless perhaps in the speech of Brutus to the people, which is a model of the scholastic eloquence of the age in which the author lived. The language of Cassius, more figurative because it is more passionate, and distinguished by a less simple loftiness than that of Brutus, is nevertheless equally exempt from triviality. Antony's harangue is a model of adroitness, and of the feigned simplicity of a skillful tactician who is desirous to gain the minds of a coarse and changeful multitude. Voltaire blames Shakspeare, at least with severity, for having presented under a comic form the scene at the feast of Lupercal, the substance of which, he says, "is so noble and interesting." Voltaire sees here nothing but a crown demanded of a free people who refuse it; but Cæsar making himself, in presence of the people, the actor of a farce prepared for his own aggrandizement, and in despair at the applause bestowed on the manner in which he acts his part, was in truth, to the wits of Rome, something extremely comic, which could not be presented to them under any other form.

The action of the piece comprises the period from the triumph of Cæsar, after the victory gained over young Pompey, until the death of Brutus, which gives it a duration of nearly three years and a half.

There is in English another tragedy on "Julius Cæsar," composed by Lord Sterline, and known to the public, as it would appear, several years before Shakspeare composed his drama, so that he may have borrowed some ideas from it. This tragedy ends with the death of Cæsar, which the author has thrown into the narrative form. A Doctor Richard Eedes, celebrated in his time as a tragic poet,

had also written a Latin play on the same subject, which was printed, it is said, in 1582, but which has been lost, as well as an English play entitled "The History of Cæsar and Pompey," which was written before the year 1579. In 1607, a play was printed in London under the title of "The Tragedie of Cæsar and Pompey, or Cæsar's Revenge." This drama, which extends from the battle of Pharsalia to that of Philippi, was performed at a private theatre by some students of Oxford, and it is supposed that it was printed in consequence of the successful performance of Shakspeare's tragedy, which Malone's chronology refers to the same year, 1607.

"Julius Cæsar" was performed, as corrected by Dryden and Davenant, under the title of "Julius Cæsar, with the Death of Brutus," and was printed in London in 1719.

The Duke of Buckingham also remodeled this same tragedy, dividing it into two parts; the first under the title of "Julius Cæsar," with many alterations, a prologue, and a chorus; and the second under the title of "Marcus Brutus," with a prologue and two choruses. Both were printed in 1722.

OTHELLO.

(1611.)

“THERE WAS ONCE in Venice a Moor of great merit, who, for his personal courage, and the proofs he had given of his conduct, as well as his vigorous genius in the affairs of war, was held in great esteem by the lords of the republic. It happened that a virtuous woman, of great beauty, called Desdemona, not drawn by female appetite, but by the virtue of the Moor, fell in love with him ; and he, subdued by the charms and noble sentiments of the lady, became equally enamored of her. Their passion was so successful that they were married, although her relations did all in their power to make her take another husband. They lived together in such peace and concord while they were at Venice, that there never passed between them either word or action that was not expressive of affection. The Venetians, resolving to change the garrison which they maintain in Cyprus, selected the Moor to the command of the troops which they destined for that island. Although he was extremely pleased with the honor proposed to him, yet was his joy diminished when he reflected on the length and inconvenience of the voyage. His wife was very much vexed at seeing the Moor disturbed ; and, not knowing the reason, said to him one day at dinner, ‘ How can you be so melancholy, after having

received from the Senate so high and so honorable a distinction?" 'My love for you, Desdemona,' replied the Moor, 'disturbs my enjoyment of the rank conferred upon me, since I am now exposed to this alternative—I must either endanger your life by sea, or leave you at Venice. The first will be terrible, as I shall suffer extremely from every fatigue you undergo, from every danger that threatens you; the second would render me insupportable to myself, as parting from you would be parting from my life.' 'Ah! husband,' returned Desdemona, 'why do you perplex yourself with such idle imaginations? I will follow you wherever you go, though it were necessary to pass through fire instead of only going by water in a safe and well-equipped vessel.' The Moor then tenderly embraced his wife, saying, 'May Heaven long preserve us in this degree of reciprocal affection!' Soon afterward, he went on board the galley with his wife, and sailed for Cyprus with a favorable wind.

"He had in his company an ensign of a very amiable outward appearance, but whose character was extremely treacherous and base. This rascal had also conducted his wife with him to Cyprus, who was a handsome and discreet woman; and, being an Italian, Desdemona was so fond of her that they passed the greatest part of their time together. In the same company was also a lieutenant, to whom the Moor was much attached. The lieutenant went often to the Moor's house, and dined frequently with him and his wife. Desdemona, seeing that the Moor was so fond of him, showed him every mark of attention and civility, with which the Moor was much pleased. The detestable ensign, forgetting his duty to his own wife, and violating all the laws of friendship, honor, and gratitude with which he was bound to the Moor, fell passion-

ately in love with Desdemona, and sought by all the private means in his power to make her conscious of his love. But she was so entirely taken up with the Moor that she thought neither of him nor of any one else ; and all that he did to engage her affections produced not the least effect. He then took it into his head that this neglect arose from her being pre-engaged in favor of the lieutenant ; and not only determined to get rid of him, but changed his affection for her into the most bitter hatred. He studied, besides, how he might prevent in future the Moor from living happily with Desdemona, should his passion not be gratified. Revolving in his mind a variety of methods, all impious and abominable, he at last determined to accuse her to the Moor of adultery with the lieutenant. But knowing the Moor's great affection for Desdemona, and his friendship for the lieutenant, he determined to wait till time and place afforded him a fit opportunity for entering on his wicked design ; and it was not long before the Moor degraded the lieutenant for having drawn his sword and wounded a soldier upon guard. This accident was so painful to Desdemona that she often tried to obtain for him her husband's pardon. In the mean time, the Moor had observed to the ensign that his wife teased him so much in favor of the lieutenant that he feared he should be obliged at last to restore to him his commission. 'Perhaps,' said the villain, 'Desdemona is fond of his company.' 'And why?' said the Moor. 'Nay,' replied he, 'I do not choose to meddle between man and wife ; but if you watch her properly, you will understand me.' Nor would he, to the earnest entreaties of the Moor, afford any further explanation."*

* See Giraldi Cinthio's "Hecatommithi," printed in Payne Collier's "Shakspeare's Library," vol. ii.

The novelist then goes on to relate all the practices of the perfidious ensign to convince Othello of Desdemona's infidelity. There is not a single detail in Shakspeare's tragedy which does not occur also in Cinthio's novel. The handkerchief of Desdemona, that precious handkerchief which the Moor had inherited from his mother, and which he had given to his wife during the early days of their love; the manner in which the ensign obtains possession of it, and leads to its discovery in the chamber of the lieutenant, whom he is desirous to ruin; the Moor's insistence upon having this handkerchief produced, and the trouble into which Desdemona is thrown by its loss; the artful conversation of the ensign with the lieutenant, to which the Moor listens at a distance, and fancies he hears all that he dreads; the plot of the duped Moor and the wretch who is deceiving him, to assassinate the lieutenant; the blow which the ensign strikes him from behind, and which cuts off his leg; in a word, all the facts, whether important or not, upon which the various scenes of the play successively rest, have been supplied to the poet by the novelist, who had doubtless added a great number of embellishments to the historical tradition which he had discovered. The *dénouement* alone is different; in the novel, the Moor and the ensign together murder Desdemona during the night, pull down the ceiling on the bed in which she slept, and say she has been crushed by this accident. The true cause of her death long remains unknown. Ere long the Moor conceives a dislike to the ensign, and dismisses him from his army. Another adventure leads the ensign, on his return to Venice, to accuse the Moor of the murder of his wife. The Moor is recalled to Venice and put to the torture, but he denies the charge; he is banished, and the relatives of Desdemona have him assassin-

ated in his exile. A new crime leads to the arrest of the ensign, and he dies racked with tortures. "The ensign's wife, who had been informed of the whole affair," says Giraldi Cinthio, "after his death, thus circumstantially related this story."

It is clear that this *denouement* could not be brought on the stage; and Shakspeare changed it because it was absolutely necessary to do so. In other respects, he has retained and reproduced every incident; and not only has he omitted nothing, but he has added nothing. He seems to have attached almost no importance to the facts themselves; he took them as he found them, without giving himself the trouble to invent the slightest addition, or to alter the slightest incident.

He has, however, created the whole; for, into the facts which he has thus exactly borrowed from another, he has infused a vitality which they did not inherently possess. The narrative of Giraldi Cinthio is complete; it is deficient in nothing that seems essential to the interest of a recital; situations, incidents, progressive development of the principal event, external and material construction, so to speak, of a pathetic and singular adventure—all these things are contained in it, ready for use; and some of the conversations even are not wanting in a natural and touching simplicity. But the genius which supplies the actors to such a scene, which creates individuals, imparts to each his peculiar figure and character, and enables us to witness their actions, to hear their words, to anticipate their thoughts, and to enter into their feelings; that vivifying power which commands facts to rise, to go onward, to display themselves and to effect their accomplishment; that creative breath, which, diffusing itself over the past, resuscitates it, and fills it in some sort with a present and im-

perishable vitality; this is what Shakspeare alone possessed; and by means of this, from a forgotten novel, he made "Othello."

All subsists, in fact, and yet all is changed. We no longer hear of a Moor, a lieutenant, an ensign, and a woman, the victim of jealousy and treason. We behold Othello, Cassio, Iago, and Desdemona real and living beings, who resemble no other, who present themselves in flesh and bone before the spectator—all entwined by the bonds of a common position, all carried away by the same event, yet each having his own personal nature and distinct physiognomy, and each co-operating to produce the general effect by ideas, feelings, passions, and acts which are peculiar to him, and result from his individuality. It was not the fact, it was not the position which struck the poet, and from which he sought to obtain all his means of awakening interest and emotion. The position appeared to him to possess the conditions of a great dramatic scene; the fact struck him as a suitable frame-work into which life might be appropriately introduced. Suddenly he gave birth to beings complete in themselves, animated and tragic, independently of every particular position and every determinate fact; he brought them forth capable of feeling, and of displaying beneath our eyes all that the special event in which they were about to take part could make human nature experience and produce; and he lunched them forth into this event, feeling very sure that, whatever circumstances might be furnished him by the narrative, he would find in them, as he had made them, a fruitful source of pathetic effects and of truth.

Thus the poet creates, and such is poetical genius. Events, and even positions, are not what he deems most important, or what he takes delight in inventing; his

power aims at exercising itself otherwise than in searching after incidents of a more or less singular character, and adventures of a more or less touching nature ; it manifests itself by the creation of man himself ; and when it creates man, it creates him complete, armed at all points, as he should be, to suffice for all the vicissitudes of life, and to present the aspect of reality in every sense of the word. Othello is something far more than a blind and jealous husband, urged to commit murder by his jealousy ; this is only his position during the play, and his character goes far beyond his position. (The sun-burned Moor, with ardent blood, and a keen and brutal imagination, credulous by the violence of his temperament as well as by the excess of his passion ; the successful soldier, proud of his fortune and his glory, respectful and submissive to the power from which he holds his rank, never forgetting the duties of war in the blandishments of love, and bitterly regretting the joys of war when he loses all the happiness of love ; the man whose life has been harsh and agitated, for whom gentle and tender pleasures are something novel which astonishes while it delights him, and which does not inspire him with a feeling of security, although his character is full of generosity and confidence) Othello, in a word, delineated, not only in those portions of himself which have a present and direct connection with the accidental position in which he is placed, but in the whole extent of his nature, and as he has been made by the entire course of his destiny ; this is what Shakspeare enables us to see. In the same manner, (Iago is not merely an irritated enemy desirous of revenge, or an ordinary rascal anxious to destroy a happiness which he can not contemplate with satisfaction ; he is a cynical and reasoning wretch, who has made for himself a philosophy of egotism

and a science of crime ; who looks upon men merely as instruments or obstacles to his personal interests ; who despises virtue as an absurdity, and yet hates it as an injury ; who preserves entire independence of thought, while engaged in the most servile conduct ; and who, at the very moment when his crimes are about to cost him his life, still enjoys, with ferocious pride, the evil which he has done, as if it were a proof of his superiority.)

Pass in review all the personages of the tragedy, from its heroes down to the least important characters—Desdemona, Cassio, Emilia, Bianca ; we behold them appearing, not under vague aspects, and with those features only which correspond to their dramatic position, but with precise and complete forms, and all the elements which constitute personality. Cassio is not introduced merely to become the object of Othello's jealousy, and as a necessity of the drama ; he has his own character, inclinations, qualities, and defects ; and from what he is naturally flows the influence which he exercises upon what occurs to him. (Emilia is not merely an attendant employed by the poet as an instrument either of the entanglement or of the discovery of the perfidies which lead to the catastrophe ; she is the wife of Iago, whom she does not love, and whom she obeys because she fears him ; but although she distrusts him, she has actually contracted, in the society of that man, somewhat of the immorality of his mind ; nothing is pure either in her thoughts or in her words ; and yet she is kind-hearted and attached to her mistress, and detests evil and deeds of darkness.) Bianca herself has her own physiognomy, entirely independent of the little part which she plays in the action. Forget the events, set aside the drama, and all these personages will continue real, animated, and distinct ; they possess inher-

ent vitality, and their existence will not disappear with their position. \ In them is displayed the creative power of the poet, and the facts, to him, are only the stage upon which he bids his characters appear.)

✓ Just as the novel of Giraldi Cinthio, in Shakspeare's hands, became "Othello," so, in the hands of Voltaire, "Othello" became "Zaire." I do not wish to compare the two works ; such comparisons are almost always vain *jeux d'esprit*, which prove nothing, except the personal opinion of the judge himself. Voltaire also was a man of genius ; the best proof of genius is the empire which it wields over men ; wherever the power of interesting, moving, and charming a whole people is displayed, this fact alone answers every objection ; genius is there, whatever fault may be found with the dramatic system or the poet. But it is curious to observe the infinite variety of the means by which *g n us* manifests itself, and how many different forms the same ground-work of positions and feelings may receive from it.

Shakspeare borrowed facts from the Italian novelist ; with the exception of the *d nouement*, he has rejected and invented none. Now facts are precisely what Voltaire has not borrowed from Shakspeare. The entire contexture of the drama, the places, incidents, and springs of action, are all new—all of his own creation. That which struck Voltaire, and which he desired to reproduce, was the passion, the jealousy—its blindness and violence ; the conflict of love and duty, and its tragic results. The whole power of his imagination was brought to bear upon the development of this position. The fable, a free invention, was constructed with this sole end in view. Lusignan, Nerestan, the ransom of the prisoners—all the circumstances are intended to place Zaire between her love and the faith

of her father, to explain the error of Orosmane, and thus to lead to the progressive manifestation of the feelings which the poet desired to delineate. He has not impressed upon his personages an individual and complete character, independent of the circumstances in which they appear. They exist only by and for passion. Beyond their love and their misfortune, Orosmane and Zaïre have nothing to distinguish them, to give them a physiognomy peculiarly their own, and to make them every where recognizable. They are not real individuals, in whom are revealed, in connection with one of the incidents of their life, the particular characteristics of their nature and the impress of their whole existence. They are in some sort general, and consequently, somewhat vague beings, in whom love, jealousy, and misfortune are momentarily personified, and who interest less on their own account, and by reason of their own character, than because they then become for a time the representatives of this portion of the feelings and possible destinies of human nature.

From this manner of conceiving the subject, Voltaire has derived admirable beauties. Grave defects and omissions have also resulted from it. The gravest of all is that romantic tint which, as it were, subjects the whole man to love, and thus limits the field of poetry, at the same time that it derogates from truth. I will quote only one example of the effects of this system; but it will suffice to indicate all.

The Senate of Venice has just assured Othello of the tranquil possession of Desdemona; he is happy, but he must depart; he must embark for Cyprus, and devote his attention to the expedition confided to his care; so he says,

“Come, Desdemona, I have but an hour
Of love, of worldly matter and direction,
To spend with thee: we must obey the time.”

These lines struck Voltaire, and he has imitated them ; but, in imitating them, what does he put into the mouth of Orosmane, when equally happy and confident ? Just the contrary of what Othello says :

“ Je vais donner une heure aux soins de mon empire,
Et le reste du jour sera à Zaïre.”

Thus Orosmane, the proud sultan, who, a moment before, was speaking of war and conquest, expressing his alarm for the fate of the Mussulmans, and blaming the sloth of his neighbors, now appears as neither sultan nor warrior ; he forgets all else, and becomes only a lover. Assuredly, Othello is not less passionate than Orosmane, and his passion will be neither less credulous nor less violent ; but he does not abdicate, in an instant, all the interests, and all the thoughts, of his past and future life. Love possesses his heart without invading his whole existence. The passion of Orosmane is that of a young man who has never done any thing, and never had any thing to do, and who is as yet ignorant of the necessities and labors of the real world. That of Othello takes root in a more complete, more experienced, and more serious character. I believe it to be less factitious, and in greater conformity to moral probabilities, as well as to positive truth. But, however this may be, the difference between the two systems is fully revealed in this feature alone. In one the passion and the position are all ; from them the poet derives all his means. In the other he obtains his resources from individual characters and the whole of human nature ; passion and a position are, for him, only an opportunity for bringing them on the stage with greater energy and interest.

The action which constitutes the subject of “ Othello ” must be referred to the year 1570, the period of the prin-

cipal attack of the Turks on the island of Cyprus, then under the rule of the Venetians. As for the date of the composition of the tragedy itself, Mr. Malone fixes it in the year 1611. Some critics doubt whether Shakspeare was acquainted with the original novel of Giraldi Cinthio, and suppose that he only had access to a French imitation of it, published at Paris in 1584, by Gabriel Chappuys. But the exactness with which Shakspeare has conformed to the Italian narrative, even in the slightest details, leads me to believe that he made use of some more literal English translation.

SHAKSPEARE'S OTHELLO,

AND

DRAMATIC ART IN FRANCE IN 1830

BY THE DUKE DE BROGLIE.*

It was not in vain that some far-seeing, conservative, and especially wise spirits addressed themselves to the authorities in the year of grace 1829; and not without good reason did they call to their aid Cæsar and his legions—that is to say, his excellency the Minister of the Interior and the honorable gentlemen of the Chamber of Deputies, adjuring them to save the sanctuary of the Muses from ruin, and to repulse the onward advance of the barbarians. The danger was only too real; and this time, as in times gone by, as Cæsar paid no regard to it, their pathetic complaints, their *gemitus Britannorum*, having been dissolved into empty vapor, behold now the evil has become irremediable! The barbarians who knocked at the doors, emboldened by impunity, have forced their way through the first inclosure; they have made a breach in the body of the place; or rather, they have constrained the citadel itself to capitulate. The Théâtre Français has surrendered through want of timely succor, because the opportunity for infusing into it new vitality was neglected. Attila-Shakspeare has taken possession of it with arms and baggage, his banners are streaming, and the clang of a thousand trumpet-calls sound in wild confusion. Alas!

* Reprinted from the "Revue Française." January, 1830.

poor poets of the old school, what will become of you? Naught remains but that feeble souls should surrender at discretion, and sacrifice themselves on the altars of the false gods, and that true believers should cover their faces with their mantles.

Banter apart, the revolution which has for some time been going on in the taste of the public is a curious phenomenon, and one singularly worthy of attention. Never has a remarkable change been introduced in a more startling mode and with greater rapidity.

Scarcely twenty years have elapsed since M. Népomucène Lemercier launched, on the stage of the Odéon, the vessel which conveyed Christopher Columbus and his genius from Spain to America. We know what was the actual reception which this attempt in the romantic style met with. However, the name of the author commanded respect, and his rare talent gave him at least a right to indulgence. In other respects he proved himself quite as hardy and prudent as his hero; he had, before hazarding his adventure, neglected nothing in order to disarm the prejudices of the pit. He only offered this foundling child as a caprice of his imagination—an unimportant freak; in decorating it, he had not scrupled to profane the consecrated regulations of tragedy, of comedy, yea, even of melodrama. His friends protested in favor of his profound regard for the triple unity; for the most sacred Aristotelian trinity; for the canonical precepts which had been consecrated in the poetic codes of Horace and Boileau, and illustrated in the learned glosses of Le Batteux and La Harpe, and in the "Rhetoric for Young Ladies." Useless precautions! In spite of the originality and unquestionable beauties which he displayed, his unfortunate "Columbus" was outrageously and repeatedly hissed. Those

who ventured to do him justice paid dearly for such audacity ; they narrowly escaped being torn to pieces by the rest of the spectators, to such an excessive height was the popular indignation roused ; there were, if we remember rightly, two who were almost knocked down on the spot—martyrs to a cause which had hardly sprung into life—the John Huss and Jerome of Prague, of a doctrine which was yet to have its Luther and its Melancthon.

At the present day, we behold at our theatres, with the greatest composure, the representation of pieces in which a duration of some twenty, thirty, or forty years, as the case may be, is condensed into an hour between eight and nine o'clock in the evening ; pieces in which, literally speaking, the principal personage,

“ *Enfant au premier acte, est barbon au dernier ;*”

pieces which are not, in other respects, very much entitled to the indulgence which is thus shown to them. While seated serenely upon our benches, we follow, without the smallest compunction, King Louis XI. from Plessis-les-Tours to Péronne, only regretting that this trifling cruise is not for us entirely a pleasure-voyage.

Seven or eight years ago two or three English comedians, who happened to be in Paris, formed the scheme of giving us at the Theatre of the Porte Saint-Martin—the Theatre of the “ *Femme à deux Maris*” and of the “ *Pied de Mouton*”—a specimen of their skill. Forthwith a great stir arose. The capture of Calais and of Dunkirk by the troops of his Britannic majesty would not certainly have excited a more patriotic wrath. As the guardians of pure doctrines, and the depositaries of wholesome traditions in all matters of taste, the boulevard public took this matter in hand with a quite inconceivable violence, and, had

it not been for the intervention of the police, Heaven only knows whether the unfortunate gentlemen of the histrionic art from the other side of the Channel would not have been stoned.

Who could then have foreseen that, three years later, the lions of Covent Garden and Drury Lane would continually cross and recross the Channel to minister to our gratification? that the most brilliant company of Paris would assiduously throng the most fashionable of our theatres in order to applaud them to the echo, and to lavish upon their system of declamation eulogies which (may we venture to say so?) were perhaps rather exaggerated?

Every one will recollect the murmurs which, on the occasion of the first representation of the "*Cid d'Andalousie*," interrupted that charming scene in which the hero of the piece, sitting tranquilly at the feet of his beloved—without purpose for the future, undisturbed by present cares, completely possessed with the idea of his approaching happiness, profoundly forgetful of the world, of men, and of all things—occupies her with the fond recital of the progress of their mutual love, and recalls to her, in verses full of delicacy and grace, the first stealthy indications of their unspoken attachment.

On this occasion, neither the talents of Talma nor those of Mademoiselle Mars could obtain any tolerance from the rigorous severity of the pit. The pit found that a beautiful scene was an appendage, that it interfered with the rapidity of the action; in one word, that it openly violated the rule, *Semper ad eventum festina*; it was, therefore, inexorable.

Enter into the Théâtre Français on the following day. there you will see Desdemona devoted to death by the stern Othello, yet half escaping from his sinister designs

and terribly distorted misconceptions, on the point of crossing the threshold of that fatal chamber which was to become her sepulchre ; you will see her, we say, pausing to detach, piece by piece, in the presence of the public, the ornaments with which she is decked, and to converse carelessly with her maid ; you will see her interrupt your confidence in the reality of the distress which is harrowing her, by informing herself of the news brought from Venice by her young relative, the messenger of the Senate ; then, all at once, recalling to her memory the days of her childhood, you will hear her murmur, in an under-tone, an old ballad no way indicating her position, except by the inexplicable sadness which is impressed upon her. You will see her at length terminate this conversation by gravely discussing the virtue and the frailty of women ; by reproving with a modest and indulgent dignity the fickleness of Emilia, and humbly praying God to watch over her, and to keep her ever pure and discreet. And you will see the public justly delighted with this scene, and manifesting far more chagrin than impatience at its close.

It is right, nevertheless, to remark one thing ; namely, that this remarkable revolution has been accomplished in respect to the taste of the public rather, or at least more decidedly, than with respect to its doctrines.

If a dramatic work be presented to the public, constructed according to the new ideas, it is received with a degree of eagerness—the public is pleased with it—it alone suffices to put them into good humor. The cup-and-ball and penny-trumpet playthings of the favorites of Henry III., more than any kind of merit that belongs to the piece, have sustained the position of M. Dumas's drama.* The delight of seeing Richard of England—deformed, crippled,

* "Henri III. et sa Cour."

and facetious—has redeemed whatever might be deemed repulsive in the subject of “Jane Shore.” “Olga” owes its success to the singular circumstance of its having been played by comic actors ; and “Marino Faliero” owes some little of its repute to the idea which it suggests of a false alliance between tragedy and melodrama.

But to tolerate, to connive, even to look with some satisfaction, is not entirely to approve. Should any one attempt to build too hastily on this foundation, if he were to rush to the conclusion that this same public has distinctly taken part in the controversy which has divided the literary world for fifteen or twenty years, he would very soon find himself considerably mistaken ; in fact, there is often a very great difference between a man’s actions and his principles, and many men who would gladly be libertines would not dare openly to declare themselves free-thinkers. Our public smiles at the attempts of the innovators, but can not escape feeling a few qualms of conscience ; it is gratified at them, but it is not quite sure whether it has any good right and reason for its gratification. Success and applause you may obtain from them, and that even at a very cheap rate ; provided, however, that this shall not be understood as furnishing any authoritative precedent. If, on the other hand, matters take a more serious turn ; if you ask the public to commit itself by a definite profession of faith, and to give its sanction, by any reflective and irrevocable act, to any dogmas of dramatic reform, you will be surprised at finding this same public infinitely circumspect.

We need not go far in search of the proof of this ; the manifestations which were made at the first representation of the “Moor of Venice” were such as to leave no doubts on this point.

On this occasion, in fact, the attempt was made without disguise. In its reception, there was no possibility of giving a tacit recognition of the change, while refusing, under shallow pretexts, to avow it. It was no longer a question as to the amount of encouragement that might be bestowed on a young author; there could be no pretense of complacently shutting the eyes to this or that license, in consideration of the address and caution shown in the style of its presentation; and no motive for indulgence could be suggested either by the small importance of the work itself, or by the more or less fluctuating condition of the theatre. No! Now a real verdict had to be pronounced; either a dramatic system entirely opposed to our own must be inaugurated, before gods and men, or its establishment must be defeated; either William Shakspeare must be received, or rejected as a rival of the masters of our stage.

This event had been for a long time in preparation; and the result was awaited with some impatience. While announcing it with the most varying expectations, the majority of our public journals agreed in declaring that this would be a memorable day—a day on which the dispute between the classical and romantic schools would be fought out upon an open arena—a day which must decide either for the triumph or for the failure of the new doctrines in literature.

Alas for the feebleness of human foresight! This so decisive day has passed, and, on the whole, we remain in very nearly the same position as before. The work of the great British tragedian was saluted with a thunder of applause; this intelligence was communicated by these same journals, but they also informed us that the thunder of applause proceeded almost exclusively from a small group

of passionate admirers, who had come with the set purpose of going into ecstasies at every point, comma, or interjection, and of bestowing with profuse liberality the epithets of idiot, imbecile, and dolt upon every one who might seem to hesitate. On the other hand, sufficiently audible hisses broke out in different places ; but it appeared that these hisses proceeded not less exclusively from another small group, quite as insignificant as the other, of embittered detractors, resolved to consider every thing detestable, and to repay with equal liberality the vituperative epithets hurled at them by their adversaries. Between these two factions, the body of the audience in the pit appears to have preserved a reasonable neutrality. They were evidently on their guard, fearing lest their consecrated maxims should be violated, and they be led into some hasty demonstrations of feeling ; and yet they were sensible, profoundly sensible, of the great beauties of the piece. Accordingly, during the whole course of the representation, they appeared constantly curious, astonished, moved, indulgent, submitting with good grace to the boldest departures from received rules ; they willingly, though without warmth or violence, joined in the attempt to silence the detractors ; and they good-naturedly allowed free scope to the enthusiasts, while taking great care not to enlist themselves on their side, or to mingle in their transports.

Thus, then, their hearts were gained, but their minds remained still undecided ; the difficulty with our reformers is not in obtaining a hearing ; it is in procuring an open recognition even from those who give them their best possible wishes. They are in the same position as that which the negroes of Saint Domingo occupied during twenty years ; the public refuses, or at least hesitates, to recognize them. But with patience they will ultimately

attain their end ; when once, in a revolution, power has been decidedly gained, right is never long withheld ; they have triumphed over unreasonable habits and prejudices, and over involuntary opposition ; this was the most intricate part of their work ; theories, especially those which are a little superannuated, have not so lingering an existence.

Such, then, being the state of things—the progress of the spirit of innovation becoming every day increasingly manifest—it remains that we should inquire into the cause of this, and ask whether the change is for the better or for the worse—whether the spirit of innovation is, this time, a spirit of light or a spirit of darkness !

A spirit of darkness, it is exclaimed, from one quarter—a veritable child of perdition !

Consult, for instance, many of our men of taste ; enter, if admission is allowed to you, into one of their assemblies ; and there, at first, you will hear much noise about the confusion of species, the neglect of rules, the forgetfulness of sound doctrines, and the contempt for true models ; afterward, however little you may feel at ease in this select committee, you will speedily learn the parties to whom all this disorder is attributed. The author of “*L’Allemagne*,” the writer of the “*Génie du Christianisme*,” the translator of “*Wallenstein*,” the two Schlegels, besides many others, are the guilty individuals ; their heads have been turned, and so they have turned the heads of their fellows. M. De Stendhal takes his share in these anathemas ; the “*Globe*” has its allotment. Not even M. Ladvocat, the publisher of the “*Théâtre Etranger*,” has escaped from them. More than one sage poet, whether in the tragico or comic line, will inform you of this with all the seriousness in the world. If no one had ever taken it

into his head to translate by the yard the monstrous productions of the countries situated beyond the Rhine, the Channel, or the Pyrenees ; if he had not afterward taken pains to publish them on fine paper and in elegant type, all with a huge parade of advertisements and placards, we should not have been brought into our present condition.

Well said this, undoubtedly, and still better reasoned !

The innocence of this unsuspecting public has been wantonly abused. The Parisian folk, like the Pnyxian people in the "Knights" of Aristophanes, are poor fools who allow themselves to be misled and duped by evil counsels.

If we diligently make all possible inquiries, we shall also find, on the left bank of the Seine, a number of saloons, in which are gathered every evening a company of worthy souls, who lament, with the truest sincerity, over the corruption of our manners. Hearing them, we might suspect that fire from heaven must fall upon us sooner or later ; our wretched country is in a worse pass than even Sodom and Gomorrah ; the French Revolution has fatally corrupted the very core of our hearts ; and whom have we to thank for this accursed revolution ? The Encyclopedists, M. Turgot and his reforms, the publication of M. Necker's *Compte-Rendu*, the—who knows what ? perhaps the substitution of waistcoats for vests, and the introduction of cabs !

The two arguments are equally forcible. To throw fire and flames at the corruption of manners, and to raise loud cries about the decay of taste, to attribute it either to this or that event, to accuse these or those writers—one is, in truth, worth about as much as the other ; the justice, good sense, and discernment are equal in either case.

May we not, in fact, say that the general sentiments of the masses, their habitual dispositions, and the ideas which rule them, are things which attach themselves to nothing, and which totter when they are but touched with the finger's end? May we not say that these are at the mercy of any fortuitous circumstances—things to be disposed of at pleasure by any half dozen volumes?

The influence of great men is, indeed, vast; we can not forget it—we would thank Heaven that it is so. And this influence is especially striking at epochs in which any important change is accomplished in government, laws, manners, or national taste; nothing, assuredly, is more natural than this—nothing can be more just and salutary. But whence do great men derive this unquestionable ascendancy?

They belong to their time—in this fact is the mystery explained; they respond to its instincts, they anticipate its tendencies; the appeal which is addressed to all indiscriminately, they are the first to hear. That which to others is as yet only an indistinct longing, has disclosed its secret to them. Superior as they are, they march at the head, unfolding their wings to every breeze that rises, clearing the path, removing obstacles, and revealing to the astonished masses the luminous truths and the eternal laws which occasion their confused desires and their latest fancies. Herein, and herein only, resides all their power: this is the condition of their success.

The philosophers of the last century, then, were not the efficient causes of the great and glorious movement of 1789; such honor is not theirs. The general causes which, during a long course of years, prepared for 1789, these same causes in their early infancy gave birth to the philosophers of the last century.

And neither are the great writers of the present day the men who have transformed the taste of the public ; we would rather say that the general causes, which were destined to produce this metamorphosis, excited and inspired, when the proper moment arrived, the great writers of our time.

What, then, were the causes of the French Revolution ?

This, certainly, is neither the time nor the place to make such an inquiry ; but every man of good sense and true wisdom will unhesitatingly allow that the causes for such an event must have been, and in fact were, very numerous, very profound, and very diversified ; that they were active and potent causes—causes which, by reason of their number, their depth, and their diversity, were beyond all external control, and against which it were puerile to entertain any spite, and absurd to attempt any revolt.

And, perchance, no other than these same causes have now changed the face of our literature—perchance these same causes have now renovated the theatre, after having reformed, and precisely because they have reformed the spectators. If so, need we feel surprise ? is there any thing very extraordinary in this ? Would it not argue a ridiculous puerility to take offense at such a circumstance, and angrily to hurl stones at it ?

Indeed, every thing depends upon the state of all other things ; the human mind is one single fabric. The different faculties, which in their union constitute the entire man, aid and appeal to one another continually. Rarely do they march in a regular and parallel advance ; but as soon as any one of them has gained decidedly upon the others, the others hasten to overtake it.

During two centuries, the French people offered a singular spectacle to the world ; for that time it moved in the

foremost ranks of European civilization, that is to say, so far as it was intrinsically worthy of occupying such a position; but to any one who takes merely a superficial glance, it might appear almost to have solved the problem of being at once the most frivolous and the most serious of all peoples—the most frivolous in important matters, the most flippant in all that affects the great interests of society and humanity, and the most grave, the most pedantic in puerilities and trifles. It was, by a hierarchical division, separated into classes, but this classification no longer corresponded to any thing that was useful or even real; it had no end out of itself, that is to say, it only existed for the mere sake of existence, to excite arrogance and vanity in the higher ranks, and envy in the lower. However, all social conditions had this in common, that they were all equally deprived of all political rights, equally estranged from all public existence, equally excluded from all participation in affairs of state, and from all active or civic callings.

The first rank was held by the court nobility. This nobility, excepting some months of occupation in times of war, was, by its very birth-right, given up to enjoyment; and this was their glory.

The provincial nobility occupied the second rank. These, in their smaller circle, imitated their betters at court. While detesting their brilliant model, they yet copied it; it never entered into the thoughts of any of their members to seek, by relations with the people, a credit and importance which they did not possess by any qualities of their ancestors, or any favors from their prince.

The civic robe had its functions; it was absolutely necessary that the townsmen should embrace different professions: but the functions of the magistracy were

often an object of ridicule and disdain. In the great parliamentary families, each aimed at laying aside the civic robe, in order to become invested with the embroidered dress. The professions of civic life stamped those who abandoned themselves to it with vulgarity; in the good families among the townspeople, each aimed at acquiring some polish by purchasing a position as secretary to the king.

The artisans in the towns, the villagers in the country, worthy heirs of Jacques Bonhomme—a gentleman subject to taxes and duties at discretion—counted for nothing, and were nothing.

What must have been the preferences of a society so constituted?

Three things—three, in truth, and no more: ambition, gallantry, and dissipation. Ambition, that is to say, the disposition to gain advancement from a master, to obtain favors, distinctions, eminent positions, pensions, and to obtain them by favoritism and the power of being agreeable, by intrigues and solicitations. Gallantry—the gratification of personal vanity or sensuality. Lastly, dissipation—dissipation under all forms, hunting parties and gambling parties, assemblies for pleasure or debauchery, balls, suppers, sights; dissipation as the definitive aim of existence, the final end of all means—life having apparently been given to man only for enjoyment, and time only to be squandered and killed.

We are speaking of society in general, and without forgetting the fact that these absolute verdicts, by reason of their very absoluteness, are always somewhat unjust and exaggerated.

But it is worthy of remark that in this so vain a mode of existence, in this state of living and acting, of thinking

and feeling, in which vanity was so predominant, nothing was abandoned to caprice ; no one affected a style of independence ; on the contrary, all was done according to rule—every where was method to be observed.

Louis XIV., while changing his nobles into courtiers, reducing his Parliaments to the level of dramatic critics, despoiling the townspeople of their franchises, and, to say all in one word, while transforming the political order of the entire nation into a civil order—had nevertheless contrived in some sort to impress on the manners and habits which resulted therefrom something of dignity and formality which belonged not to their nature—far from it—but to his character.

His court was grave, although the morals of the courtiers were in no respect better on this account ; his magistrates were grave without being independent ; the temper of his times was grave, and yet servile.

After his reign, that imperious necessity by which man is impelled to exalt into maxims the motives, whatever they may be, which determine his conduct, and to refer his own conduct to certain principles, were it only in order that he may know what he has done and whither he is tending—which also leads him thus to regard the actions of others, were it only that he may be able to approve or condemn them—this necessity operated, if not in the same sense, yet in one analogous to that in which it had operated under Louis XIV. Thus the best method of making way in the world became a science which the old courtier taught *ex cathedra* to his children—a science which had its dogmas, its precepts, and its traditions.

Not more methodically does an engineer make his approaches to a place which he is besieging, than did those ambitious of vindicating the worthiness of their descent

push their researches into the offices of the minister and the cabinets of Versailles. The Duke De Saint Simon, the most severe, the sincerest, and the most honorable man that ever lived at the court, devoted three fourths of his honorable life to the decision of points of precedence or respect, on his own account or for those connected with him—questions of which even the most important could, at the present day, only induce us to shrug our shoulders and to smile derisively. Sometimes he displayed more character than would have been necessary, on the other side of the Channel, to enable a Marlborough or a Bolingbroke to impose peace or war on their sovereign, and more erudition and research than a Benedictine would put into a folio volume.

Gallantry was a perpetual war between the two sexes—a war which had its tactics and stratagems, its principles of attack and defense, its appropriate times for resistance and surrender, its rights of conquest, and its law of nations.

In fact, the life of society was obliged to submit to all the exigencies of a conventional morality, very different from true morality, often in direct opposition to it, but quite as rigorous, and even more inaccessible to repentance. It recognized as the supreme law, even in its most minute details, a certain code of proprieties, the yoke of which must be borne gracefully—the sensibilities were to be controlled, while the scholar must appear perfectly at ease.

Good breeding was the highest of human attainments, and the art of living the first of all arts.

It is said that literature expresses the life of society—especially is this affirmed of dramatic literature. If this be true, and, in a certain sense, it undoubtedly is true,

due limitations being conceded, then our general literature, and more especially our drama, must have reflected more or less accurately this two-fold character of frivolity as to the essence of things, and pedantry as to their forms.

Accordingly it has done both. Here, too, undoubtedly, exceptions must be made, and that to a considerable extent. Our literature has ruled in Europe for a hundred years, and never has it demanded from men an admiration to which it was not reasonably and justly entitled; but still, with regard to its most general features, we may admit that it has been neither learned, as the literature of Germany at the present time is, and as was Italian literature in the times of Petrarch and Politian, nor popular as the literature of Spain was during the period of its greatest vigor. It was essentially and pre-eminently a polite literature, in which the main result aimed at was conversation.

The same may be said of our drama. Regarded in its most general features, it was not so much a national drama as an elegant and fashionable amusement, a pastime for gentlemen of respectable station and bearing, at which the public might assist if it paid liberally for the honor; nearly as it is allowed occasionally to look on from the outer side of the barriers, and watch the progress of a dress ball or a state dinner.

Admiration for the ancients was universally affected; our watch-word was, "Imitate the Ancients;" this was our "Montjoie Saint-Denis!" in literature. And yet a true appreciation of antiquity was not possessed by really learned men, even by those who really did possess a hearty appreciation of the refinements of Greek and Latin idiom. It is, however, well known that the period of erudition quickly passed. It is not to be denied that, by the mid-

dle of the seventeenth century, sound learning and substantial erudition were every where on the decline, and that, at the end of the eighteenth, they had fallen almost into entire neglect. Accordingly, our dramatic productions only resembled the master-pieces of Greece in name and in the choice of subjects, by certain purely external characteristics, by the blind observance of certain maxims, whose origin was not cared for and whose relative importance was not appreciated, and by a punctilious deference to the distinction between different species of the drama. So far as the real character of the works was concerned, as to the characters, sentiments, ideas, and colorings introduced, all this was not only modern, but belonged to the existing state of society—not only French, but the French of Paris, or even of Versailles.

The appreciation of national history and monuments was hardly in a better position. There was no taste for antiquities ; no sympathy with the recollections of the masses and the traditions of the country ; there was nothing fresh and living in the study of foreign languages and literatures.

And how can we wonder at it ? In mental culture, as in all other things, the thread of destiny was in the keeping of good society. At the cost of living and dying ignorant, it was necessary to be fashionable, first in the *ruelles*, then in the circles and entertainments of social life. Poets, orators, historians, or moralists, under the influence of the court during the reign of Louis XIV., who honored them increasingly with his notice, but who always kept them at a proper distance, became all-powerful under his successor, so as to be in some sort a fourth order in the state, astonishing at that time France and Europe by the boldness of their thoughts and the ascendancy of their

talent: they were not ashamed to affect the lofty airs of nobles of high rank, and the petty dignities of coxcombs. Thus the writers of France have always ruled the life of men of the world, and have by their intrigues gained successes in society, degraded their genius to the limits of its narrow and confined atmosphere, and flattered those very whims which they professed to ridicule. No country has shown itself more fertile in men of great mind than ours; no country has, so much as our own, compelled these minds, whether they like it or not, to muffle themselves up in the livery of respectability. We may find even books of the greatest literary weight which seem, like their authors, to have adopted the fineries of the time, in order to adorn their exterior. Can we forbear smiling, for example, when we see the illustrious Montesquieu sometimes decking his great work with spangles, and oftener still using epigrams for the purpose of giving smartness to it; and all in order that the leaves of his immortal work might enjoy the rare advantage of being turned over by flippant spirits, and read aloud at ladies' toilets.

And then, what immeasurable importance was attached to light literature! What an event was the publication of a new piece, or of a collection of fugitive poems! What a hit for some election to a chair, or for some green-room intrigues! What a swarm of poetasters of all dimensions! What a herd of pretentious prose-writers on all subjects of interest! And what a conviction on the part of all these, that the human race ought, laying aside every other occupation, to fix its eyes upon them alone; and that the world had been created, five or six thousand years before, merely that it might enjoy their small productions, assist in their small triumphs, and take part in their small controversies!

The French Revolution cast down the whole of this social edifice ; and it has, so to speak, razed it to the ground !

Whether this is an evil or a good, each man must determine for himself. Certain it is that we owe to this revolution the restitution of men to their proper ranks, and of things to their appropriate places ; this it is that has restored the true relation of names and things. Henceforth the serious is serious, the frivolous is frivolous. Conventionalities have given place to realities.

The French are equal among themselves ; they have their individual rights to carry out ; and they have duties to fulfill toward the state. All honorable professions are honored ; each leads to a worthy end. No longer are there legal distinctions which are not derived from any diversity of rights and functions ; no longer are there social distinctions which rest upon no superior merit, education, or enlightenment. Ambition is obliged to exhibit its titles, and to show itself in open daylight ; depraved habits must seek concealment ; crime must shelter itself under excuses.

In presence of such a new condition of men and things, that which was formerly denominated the great world must consent that its star should decline. It has finished as the monarchy of the great King Louis has finished ; it has abdicated as did the Emperor Napoleon, who regarded the great king as his predecessor, and neglected no means of reviving the state that existed in his time. We have seen this great world pass away, with its fantastic prohibitions and its immoral indulgences, with its flimsy proprieties and its scrupulous injunctions, with its heroes of good fortune and its jurisdiction of old women. Our court is now only a coterie, if, indeed, it can claim even to be so much as that ; a thousand other coteries share the town

among them ; each city of any considerable extent has its own coteries ; all these partial societies are independent of each other, and make no foolish pretensions to mutual domination or remonstrance ; every one amuses himself where and how he can, and no one finds fault with him ; and, accordingly, no one attempts to extract glory out of his pleasures, and to believe himself on this account a great man.

With a change of manners there has been a change of tastes. General life has become simple and active, laborious and animated. Every man occupies his place, has a distinct aim, and aims at that which is worth the labor he bestows upon it. Public discussions and a free press afford an uninterrupted stream of information concerning the greatest human and national interests. The bloodless, but ardent and vehement, struggles of the tribune divide, excite, irritate, or enliven every day, and carry us onward from fear to hope, from triumph to defeat.

In order to beguile the attention of the public from these powerful attractions, literature must present something else besides distractions which it no longer needs ; and must afford a means of passing the time which shall not impose any extra burden. Literature must either attract or instruct—it must raise man from himself and from all around him, or it must powerfully urge him to reflection and meditation. The rivalries of poets are no longer any thing to him ; academic disputes lie out of his world. He has no disposition to engage in the controversy which would determine,

“ Des deux Poinsinet lequel fait le mieux les vers ; ”

nor to subsist for a fortnight on that which is worth no more than one of Chamfort's epigrams, one of Panard's songs, or one of Dorat's heroics.

Accordingly, for the last twelve or fifteen years, that is to say, since the time when France first began to breathe quietly again after the horrors of anarchy and the confusions of conquest, while we see all that small, affected literature which had its summer of *Saint Martin* under the empire, fall into insignificance and disrepute, at the same time that we see genteel garbs, court manners, and beautiful monarchical principles abandoned, we also see springing up on all sides a taste for whatever is solid and true. Erudition is being restored ; there is a more real appreciation of the ancients now than there ever was in any former time ; the knowledge of foreign languages is being extended every day ; voyages are being multiplied ; scientific and literary correspondence is being extended on all sides ; central institutions for intellectual pursuits are established in our departments, and are beginning to undertake laborious inquiries respecting our national antiquities. The Normal School glittered only for a season, but it has left permanent memorials of its existence ; it has founded, for example, a philosophical school, which now occupies a foremost position in Europe, which does not swear by the words of any master, which does not despise the labors of any of its predecessors, which does not blink any of the great problems of the world and of humanity ; while it neither arrogantly attempts to decide them by a few phrases, nor infatuatedly dismisses them with disdain. Side by side with this philosophical school, a historical school has arisen, in which a union is often effected between that vast erudition which allows no details to escape it, and that powerful imagination, we would willingly say, that half-creative imagination, which knows how to revive times and men that have passed away, and presents them before us glowing with the colors of life and

of truth. The admirable romances of the most original and fertile genius of our period, so riveting and instructive, filled at once with reality and poetic invention, with the idiosyncrasy of the writer and the erudition of the schools, with ability and gracefulness—these romances all testify, by their immense popularity, to the not less popularity of that mental disposition which they inspire. For, in fact, the delight felt by the upper classes, and the admiration expressed for them by those of high culture is but a small part of their success; they penetrate into counting-houses, they descend into shops, answering a universal and imperious necessity, and affording it an aliment which entertains without completely satisfying it.

Can we seriously believe that, in this general forward movement, the theatre will remain stationary? Can it be that the public will bring to the drama other ideas, other tastes, other dispositions than those which it carries into all other places and all other things?

The play must, in these times, address itself to the public; it must interest and excite them; no longer is it designed to relieve the monotony of a couple of hours for a select number of languid, lounging, fashionable gentlemen, or to supply materials for conversation to four or five recognized cliques and their dozens of humbler imitators who may frequent the coffee-houses. And this change must inevitably influence, sooner or later, the general tone of all dramatic writings. Those immortal beauties—beauties for all times and all places—with which our theatre abounds, have not, thank Heaven! lost their power over our minds; but where, henceforth, will an audience be found to relish the precious metaphysical gallantry, the comic or tragic balderdash, the philosophical and sentimental declamation which so often disfigure it?

Can we really think, for instance, that if the great Corneille were to return to earth, the Romans which he might exhibit would not be somewhat sensible of the increased efficiency of our colleges? Can we believe that the illustrious Racine, if he should revisit us, would still make Achilles talk like a French chevalier, and put madrigals into the mouth of Pyrrhus, Mithridates, or Nero? Can we believe that Voltaire, the brilliant and pathetic Voltaire, if he should once again take his place among us, would make Zaïre profess indifference to all matters of religion, and declaim to the savages of America on toleration—that he would represent Mohammed employing the inflated periods of a Tartuffe, and depict Gengis-Khan under the guise of a faded libertine and a philosopher disappointed with human greatness? No! Emphatically No! Every thing in its place and time! Voltaire himself was the first to ridicule the heroes who preceded him—*tender, mild, and discreet*; he was the first to hold up to scorn the ridiculous fashion of describing

“Caton galant et Brutus dameret.”

He has attempted tragedies in which there are no love scenes; he has proposed to restore to us, once for all, the Greeks of Greece and the Romans of Rome; and the reason why he did not completely succeed was only that he was not sufficiently acquainted with them. Chenier, in his turn, has thought good to remodel Voltaire's “*Œdipe*.” Still, Voltaire was the first who attempted to appeal to national sentiments and popular recollections, and many others since his time have followed in his track. We might trace back to a time considerably anterior to the beginning of this century, a confused sense of the necessity for a reform in the theatre, a dim consciousness how

much there was in the existing state of the theatre that was formal, narrow, and contemptible. Grimm's correspondence indicates this in every page. More than seventy years ago, Collé lampooned the French tragedy in a satiric poem full of wit, in which great good sense is contained beneath an inexhaustible vein of drollery. And if this want was felt thus strongly at this period, what must be the case now, when authors, as we have just said, have to do no longer with a fictitious, but with a real public? when that same public has, for more than forty years, taken its part in all the great realities of public as well as private life.

Indeed, we ourselves, who are now occupying the scene, have taken part in terrible events; we have witnessed the fall and rise of empires: and how can we be persuaded that such revolutions are accomplished by some six or seven persons, whose two or three uninteresting confidants bustle and declaim in a space of fifty square feet? We have known, and that personally, great men—conquerors, statesmen, conspirators—men of flesh and blood: powerful by their arms, by their genius, and by their eloquence; and, in order to be interested, we must be pointed to men equally real, to men who resemble them in all respects.

Still, if our actually existing poets were men of the stamp of Racine and Voltaire—if, like those great men, they knew how to animate a deplorably withered frame by lavishing upon it all the treasures of sentiment and of poetry—if, imitating the noble birds of the days of chivalry, they could, like them, although carried on the hand, release themselves from time to time from the straitness of their position, and soar into the clouds with a brilliant and rapid flight, they might win some success. But it is not so; and this is exactly the one inconvenience of a

style which flourished a hundred years ago, with which we, the public of to-day, are obliged to remain contented and happy.

Tragedies have been almost all fashioned after one model—all cast so very nearly in the same mode, that any one rather experienced in theatrical progression might boldly foretell the scheme of each scene as it arrived. In the first act there is the narrative of the dream or the storm; the second contains the declaration, the third the recognition, and so on. The Alexandrines march on in stately order, and seem, most of them, to belong to the stock of theatrical properties, as much as the decorations and costumes. The personages have their parts and movements appropriated and determined like the pieces in a game of chess; so much so, that we might call them, for the sake of convenience, by some generic name; for example, the king, the tyrant, the queen, the conspirator, the confidant—almost, as Goëthe has entitled the interlocutors in one of his dramas, the father, the mother, the sister, and so on. What, for instance, does it matter whether the queen, who has killed her husband, be called Semiramis, Clytemnestra, Joan of Naples, or Mary Stuart; whether the royal legislator is called Minos or Peter the Great; whether the usurper is called Artaban, Polyphontes, or Cromwell—when their words and actions, their thoughts and feelings, are always the same, or very nearly so? when they are only so many variations on one necessary plot?

It is said that a young poet, whose name we have forgotten, having borrowed the subject of his tragedy from the history of Spain, and finding himself on this account brought into collision with the censor of the press, took it into his head to transport the scene, by two strokes of his

pen, from Barcelona to Babylon, and to carry the events back from the sixteenth century to a period somewhere near the time of the deluge; a plan which succeeded to his heart's content, besides that, as *Babylone* rhymes to the same words as *Barcelone*, and is composed of exactly the same number of syllables, there was but little necessity for changing the most vigorous and lofty speeches. We do not guarantee the truth of the story, but we do not think it at all improbable.

Doubtless, this insupportable monotony—the evils and puerilities of so much conventional apparatus—the disgust, the weariness, the satiety which it all excites in such a public as ours—the despondency at seeing nothing true produced for the stage—these causes have constantly led the way to all kinds of innovation. Our public is not to be captivated either by system or by caprice; it is no despiser of really excellent productions; it has no disposition to blaspheme the demi-gods of past times; but, like the little girl, it says, “My good friend, I have seen the sun so often!” Like the grand Condé, it says, “I am quite ready to forgive the Abbé D’Aubignac for not having observed the rules, but I can not forgive the rules which have made him produce such an execrable piece.”

In the midst of this perplexity, not knowing what saint to invoke, who can deliver them from this

“Race d’Agamemnon qui ne finit jamais,”

these everlasting bores who, if they are hissed down to-day in the toga, will reappear to-morrow hooded with a turban; in this perplexity, certain talented critics make their appearance, writers of the rarest ability and of the greatest sagacity, who, with a good-natured smile, address the public in some such terms as these :

“ Can you not see what all this weariness under which you groan is owing to ? and whence arises this monotony which sickens you ? In a given time and space only a certain number of things are possible ; and the more circumscribed the space, the more limited the time, the fewer events can be brought before you. Names may be changed, costumes may be changed, but no further change is possible. And much more must this be the case if you multiply arbitrary prescriptions and prohibitions ; if you demand, for instance, that the individual who weeps shall do nothing but weep, and that the laughter shall do nothing but laugh ; if you forbid him who has once spoken in verse from speaking afterward in prose, or *vice versa*, or if you forbid him who has once spoken in a verse of twelve syllables from ever making use of a verse of rather smaller dimensions ; and if you determine it to be beneath the dignity of tragedy to employ any colloquial forms of expression. Bind a man hand and foot—as you please ; put a mask on his countenance—very good ; condemn him to recite litanies to the Virgin in a style of passive imperturbability—be it so ; but do not then demand of him variety in his movements, flexibility in his physiognomy, or diversity in his language.”

And the public must confess that this is very plausible reasoning.

Accordingly, when young poets, encouraged by favorable circumstances, advance timidly before the people, and humbly beg them to hold them, for a time, free from consecrated rules and cruelly rigorous fetters, promising, in return for this indulgence, to move them, to interest them, to show them living and real events—the public answers them, “ Make the attempt, we will listen attentively.”

This is the secret of that which is transpiring at the

present day. Are not we then, in France, in danger of being betrayed into some rash procedures? For forty years, established usages have been attacked which appeared more solid than our theatrical system; things which seemed more sacred even than Aristotle's precepts have been looked at with bold defiance.

If, at this crisis, a great dramatic poet should arise among us—if this great dramatic poet would take part with the innovators, all difficulties would very soon be overcome. But, unfortunately, we have no such dramatist; as far as talent is concerned, the authors of the new school have not hitherto had a very decided advantage over their brethren of the old school. Their works certainly possess more interest, more movement, more variety; but these merits belong to the school to which they have attached themselves, and this is the reason why their works have drawn crowds, while the productions of their more old-fashioned brethren are abandoned. But their works are indicative rather of reminiscence than of invention; more of an honest disposition to create than of a creative genius. The execution betrays absence of power and groping after effect, rather than native vigor and genuine originality. The blame rests with the individuals; and this is the reason why the public is as yet undecided which of the two opposed systems it shall finally adopt, and shows itself much more disposed to thank them for their efforts than to award them the palm of triumph.

How long, then, is this feeble flight of dramatic talent, this sterility of true genius, with which, to our great regret, the new school—that school which has hardly existed more than four or five years—has been stricken: how long is this to last? The answer to such a question must remain unknown to man, and must be left to Providence;

our fervent wish, both for the credit of art and the honor of our country, is that it may not be delayed very long. Meanwhile, is it graceful, and, above all, is it just, for the partisans of the old system in literature to exult over this fact, as they too often do? Are they reasonable in asking us, with an air of raillery, what master-pieces the new theatrical system can boast of? Have they any right to say to the critics who have expounded and displayed it, "You know not whereof you are speaking; and, as a proof of this, nothing that has been done under your auspices at all corresponds to your magnificent promises?"

We might even agree with them; for if, by way of reprisal, we should afterward ask, concerning Aristotle's *Poetics*, what tragedies of worth it succeeded in inspiring in Greece; concerning Horace's *Ars Poetica*, what illustrious monuments of its truthfulness remain from the theatre of the Latins; concerning La Harpe's *Cours de Littérature*, what master-pieces we may thank it for? the answer would not be very much to their advantage.

Nature alone creates great poets; by her sole agency the world has been gifted, at long intervals, with a Sophocles, a Shakspeare, a Racine, a Molière; and after each such effort, the repose is long and protracted. No human endeavors can be so successful as to supply the lack of that which nature alone can give; and any theory for the creation of great men—any pompous *megalanthropogenesy*—is an insane imposition, either in literature or any where else. We will even go further; what is true of genius is equally true of talent: however little of it may exist, yet in whatever degree it is to be found, nature alone has all the honor. Criticism does for it nothing more than it does for every one else; it has no formula of

talent ready made ; it has no receipts for the manufacture of good tragedies and amusing comedies.

Nothing is, in fact, more common than thus to misapprehend the design and nature of certain things.

When the *Organon* of the Stagyrice philosopher was rediscovered in the Middle Ages, those who first studied it thought they had met with a kind of enchantment, and certainly they had good reason for so thinking ; for this *Organon*, this admirable logical system, is one of the most wonderful monuments of the greatness and power of the human mind that exists. But immediately they started to the conclusion that the aim of logic was to teach men reasoning, and that reasoning was, if not the only, yet certainly the principal means of attaining truth—that whosoever should thoroughly master the syllogism could never again be deceived in any thing, and would have reached the utmost boundaries of human knowledge. This was a great mistake ; no one can estimate the follies and sophistries, the strifes and subtleties, which this has cost us. Logic teaches man nothing which he could not already do alone, and without its assistance ; the syllogistic procedure is the natural and spontaneous method ; it need not be formally learned in order to its being employed. There are, besides, other conditions for good reasoning—a clear vision and an adequate conception of the subject, a just regard to all the conditions implied in the problem to be solved, and the faculty of retaining them firmly during the whole course of the deduction. And these things are all given by nature ; logic can not impart the secret of acquiring them. Must we, then, on the other hand, conclude, as some philosophers have concluded, that logic is good for nothing ? By no means ; this would be to rush blindly to the opposite extreme. The design of logic is

not to teach men to reason, but to teach them how they actually do reason ; it is a branch of mental philosophy ; it discloses to us the nature of one of our most remarkable mental processes ; it explains to us its laws, its action, its mechanism ; it reveals the human mind to itself. He who studies it properly will always study it advantageously ; he will rise from this study with a more enlightened and practiced, a stronger and more dexterous mental organ—more fitted, in one word, for all things, not even excepting reasoning itself ; for never is it in any respect fruitless to develop human intelligence, and to enlarge and purify the judgment.

The same must be said of criticism. It also is a branch of mental philosophy. It also enlightens the mind with regard to its own operations, and shows it in reflection the method of its own activity ; but it neither confines it within the limits of the schools, nor subjects it to a dwarfing and lasting pupillage.

The beautiful exists ; it exists in the external world and in the soul of man, in the phenomena of nature and in the events in which humanity displays itself. Sometimes it is manifested entirely in these regions ; but oftener it gives only a glimpse and a hint of its presence. Genius seizes it and makes it its own possession ; it receives the impression, and then gives it out in a purer and more vivid state than that in which it first appeared ; it is surprised by the vision, and it surprises in its turn by the presentation of it. Thus genius acts under the influence of an inspiration ; unconsciously, yet most spontaneously, it avails itself of the processes of art. The eagle flies because it is an eagle ; the stag bounds because it is a stag.

What, then, is the province of criticism ? Its position

is that of a mediator between the master-pieces of art and the minds which are desirous of appreciating them ; between the man of talent and the readers whom he addresses ; sometimes between him and the man of genius. Whether we be small or great, gifted with insight or not, it initiates us into the secret of these marvelous beauties ; it displays before us their delicate processes, their hidden relations, their mystic laws. This is its work ; neither more nor less.

But now is the time for the approach of ratiocinative mediocrity ; it advances with lofty assumption, bearing the staff of office, availing itself of these expositions in order to erect, by means of them, a clumsy structure of exact formulas—burlesquing these delicate and cautious explanations by resolving them into pedantic precepts, and appealing to lesser spirits to experiment upon their select list of instructions, practical precepts, and petty routines. At its bidding, the laborers set to work. Equipped with their rule and compass, they draw the lines and measure out the compartments, they dissect most methodically the mighty productions of men of genius, plundering on the right hand and on the left, pillaging from one a posture, from another a stroke of sentiment, from a third an idea, from a fourth a poetic touch, and, readjusting all these bits according to the best of their ability, they at length produce a sorry, complicated piece of mosaic, dressed in truly harlequin gear. Hence arises, in all languages which have received a small amount of culture, a deluge of bastard productions, which are neither good nor bad, neither beautiful nor ugly, neither interesting nor ridiculous, and which have no other fault than the irremediable one of corresponding to nothing whatever that exists either in man or nature, neither in the mind of the would-be poet

nor in that of his unfortunate reader. Hence, for example, the amusement which so many poets of the last century gave themselves, of composing tens of thousands of pastoral verses, which gave no indication that during the whole period of their existence they had so much as cast a glance upon any tree in the Tuileries, or watched the course of any river in the Gobelins. Hence arose, in a word, all that rendered literature dull and poetry fantastic.

Criticism that is worthy of the name—true criticism, indeed—has nothing to do with this foolish attempt to construct the agreeable and the beautiful into a fabric. Its aim is not to teach how beautiful things may be made, but to exhibit before all eyes, and help all minds to understand the lustre of those things which are beautiful. Its aim is to increase the number of lofty and refined spirits—minds of liberality and sagacity, of delicacy and enlightenment; it is to prepare for men of genius and of talent, whenever nature may please to inspire such, a public worthy of receiving them, whose admiration may animate them, and whose severe taste may calm and moderate their too exuberant activity.

This being granted, may we say that the new criticism, that criticism to which has been imputed, whether advisedly or not—or, rather, we would question whether or not it is fitting to impute to this criticism alone and entirely—the revolution which has been declared in our theatre: may we say that this criticism has entirely failed in its object? If it has not, by one stroke of any magic wand, transformed men of moderate talent into great poets, may it not have smoothed the way before great poets who may yet arise? If it has not caused beautiful works of art to spring forth from the bosom of the earth, may it not have

opened many eyes, and unstopped many deafened ears? May it not, to a certain extent, have so prepared the way for great works, if ever Heaven shall grant them to us, that they may, on their arrival, find an audience disposed to appreciate them and qualified to estimate them?

Far are we from thinking that, in this respect, its labors have been entirely unavailing. On the contrary, we are much more disposed to suspect that, in more than one relation, and we will by no means limit ourselves to unimportant relations, the new criticism has succeeded beyond its expectations, and perhaps even beyond its desires; we are disposed to suspect that it has made something which is of greater value than itself—that it has involuntarily disencumbered us of more shackles than it was itself aware of, of more even than it had estimated. What is, in fact, the error of criticism in general—we mean of all criticism that has any weight (the smaller species are not worth our notice)—a kind of error from which the new criticism is not exempt to any great extent?

It is, as it seems to us, a certain absence of mental liberty when absorbed in the contemplation of things which the mind either approves or condemns; a certain impulsive, passionate, intolerant disposition, which prevents it from reproving with the severity of justice any thing faulty in that which it admires, and of admiring with generous self-abandonment whatever may be excellent in the productions which it condemns.

The ancients, for example, are admired every where—and unquestionably they are entitled to be so: they are admired in France, in Germany, in England; they are admired from very different motives, sometimes from motives contradictory to one another, and certainly this admiration rests upon very different principles in different

cases. But, in truth, where have they as yet been judged? where have they been appreciated without conventional enthusiasm, without an unquestioning devotion? Will not the man who shall first venture openly to expose their defects, whatever respect he may retain for them, stand a chance of being browbeaten, and abused as a Barbarian and a Goth? We ourselves, who dare to hint such an insinuation—what a storm of wrath may possibly be preparing to burst over our head?

The great masters of our language have been very ably appreciated, analyzed, and commented upon by La Harpe—for La Harpe was no vulgar critic—but, on the one hand, he would not have deemed that sufficient homage had been shown to Racine and Voltaire, had he not fastened Shakspeare by the heels to their triumphal car, and dragged him along in the mud; and, on the other hand, he can not venture, except at rare intervals, and with faltering accents, to expose any trifling imperfection in the objects of his adoration; the enormous defects of our drama do not at all shock him; he does not even seem to have perceived them.

On the other hand, let us take, as representative of the new criticism, the man who is undeniably its glory and ornament—the man who, by the extent and variety of his knowledge, by the profundity and originality of his views, by the lively appreciation of the beautiful, which ever animates him, and by that ingenious sagacity which never forsakes him, has had the greatest influence on the ideas and opinions of his contemporaries—Wilhelm Schlegel. He will be found to exhibit the obverse side of the medal.

He admires Shakspeare most thoroughly; he has translated him with all the fondness of a pupil for a master; he has also a passionate admiration for Calderon and the

Spanish drama. But, in order to balance his excesses in these directions, he habitually judges our drama with something more than rigor; to the admirable unaffectedness and comic vein of Molière he is entirely insensible; he deprecates the "Phèdre" of Racine as much inferior to the "Phœdra" of Euripides; to many of our merits he frequently grants neither sympathy nor justice; to our most venial defects he is mercilessly severe. He admires Shakspeare, and, in his enthusiasm, not only is Shakspeare perfect in all respects, but all that appertains, either immediately or more remotely to Shakspeare, participates in the perfection of this ideal.

According to his judgment, the period in which Shakspeare flourished was not only a great and remarkable period, but a period of taste and politeness; it was not only learned, but refined; urbanity, grace, and refined pleasantries were its most prominent and characteristic features.

Shakspeare himself is not only a great poet, but a profound philosopher, whose thoughts have sounded, down to their lowest depths, all the mysteries of the world, and all the intricacies of the human soul. Not only are his pieces in the highest degree effective, but they are composed with a marvelous and irreproachable art; every thing, whether it be great or small, finds its proper place and its just estimate in his writings. The gross obscenities with which he abounds are bursts of native humor; the puns, quips, and quibbles which are to be met with at every step, even in the most pathetic passages, are sallies of the most irreproachable taste; his anachronisms have their merits; his errors in geography, in history, in the portraiture of men and manners, all have their explanations.

The same idolatry, the same superstitious ardor is shown for the Spanish drama.

It must be admitted that those of our French critics who were the first to adopt the doctrines of Schlegel have taken care not to go quite so far as he. They were sensible of his exaggerations. They have maintained their former admiration for Racine side by side with their more recent admiration for Shakspeare; and they have persisted in throwing the blame of the mistakes of Shakspeare himself upon the times in which he lived, and upon the rare genius with which Heaven endowed him.

But we must confess, also, that this wisdom has been neither general nor of long duration. To see how the leaders of our modern school express themselves when speaking of the English and the Germans—of Schiller, of Shakspeare, and of Goëthe—we may easily perceive that they occupy, with reference to these writers, the same mental posture which La Harpe occupied with reference to Racine or Voltaire; that while they are quite willing to express censure on a point of trifling importance, they do so on the implied condition that nothing of a serious or fundamental character shall be questioned by them.

For example, in the attempt to present "Othello" in its complete form for the Théâtre Français (an attempt which, moreover, we will applaud from the very bottom of our heart), in this attempt to reproduce "Othello," verse by verse, without any abridgment, except of a part which the police would not have suffered to pass—the part of a girl of vicious life, a part besides which is quite useless, and a crowd of indecent equivoques and disgusting obscenities—who could be persuaded to see in all this a design to offer to the public, not a spectacle interesting on account of its novelty, or curious because of the period to which it carries us back, but an accomplished model of art—a work perfect in all its features?

Well ! we will venture to assert that the time for these exaggerations has already passed in France ; we will venture to predict that there is in the general good sense of the people—a good sense which the controversies that have been going on for the last fifteen or twenty years have developed and prepared—something which will prove an invincible obstacle to these adorations of individuals, and will prevent them from ever so gaining ground as to become common opinions and recognized doctrines. We have, with some trouble, emancipated ourselves from one extreme—we will not allow ourselves to run heedlessly into its opposite. We have disencumbered ourselves from some thousands of small prejudices—we will not allow ourselves to be swathed in a host of prejudices of another kind.

Every time that the attempt which has just been made at the Théâtre Français shall be renewed (and we hope it may be often renewed—this will be a much more worthy thing than the presentation before us of new and mediocre pieces), the problem which has already been once offered will be repeated—whether the public will consent to abandon the freedom of its judgment in favor of any thing, by whatever sanctions it may be supported—whether many of the things which it is asked to admire it will be contented only to tolerate—whether other things, similarly presented, it will condemn—whether others will be received with admiration, but from new motives, of a more immediate and personal character—whether, so far at least as impartiality is concerned, it will show itself to be superior to its leaders—and whether it will regard what is presented to it from a point of view more elevated than theirs.

We say that this has already been once realized ; and we say so, not only because the mass of the public refused

to take a decided stand either with the detractors of Shakspeare or with his enthusiastic admirers—this neutrality was rather owing, as we have already explained, to the unsettled state of its ideas and doctrines than to the fear lest they should be compromised—but because the impression which the piece made, in its general effect and in its details, appeared to us to involve a true judgment, an unconscious, not a premeditated judgment, which could only be read on the countenances of the audience, a judgment which did not always square (far from it) with those ideas which the most accredited critics endeavor to give us on the English work, but which was more original, and, in our judgment, more worthy of respect than theirs.

The drama in question is divided into two nearly equal parts; in the first part, which comprises the first two acts and some scenes of the third, the comic element is most conspicuous; the tragic, or to speak more exactly, the dignified, the serious, element only appears once for a brief space; in the second part, on the contrary, the tragic element predominates, the comic only appears in transient flashes.

This distinction is made with such precision in the original, that, in general, the comic part is written in prose, while the tragic part is written almost uniformly in verse; a kind of mixture which Shakspeare ordinarily used with most marvelous dexterity, but which the French translator has not ventured to introduce upon our stage.

The comic part appeared to be long and rather overdrawn; the general effect which it produced was a feeling of disapprobation and impatience.

To what is this to be attributed? Was it merely the effect of the admixture of comedy and tragedy? a feeling of the incompatibility of these equally simultaneous im-

pressions? Doubtless the majority of the audience would thus have interpreted what they felt. But suppose the comic part had been of a different character—that it had been better managed, disposed more judiciously, distributed according to a juster proportion—would the same effect have been produced? There was nothing to indicate that it would; and the favor with which some salient points were received, and the universal laughter which they excited, may even induce a contrary opinion.

The idea of allotting an equal, or nearly an equal share of attention to two opposite elements, appears to us a violation of due proportions, and to rest upon a false principle. We are not usually sticklers for the unities; still, however, we believe that a certain fundamental unity is, in every case, a condition under which the beautiful is manifested here below. The effect, the legitimate effect of the beautiful, whatever it may be, is to raise the soul above itself, to transport it, by a kind of magic enchantment, into a sphere where all its transitory interests disappear, and to abolish for a time the sentiment of its individuality. Now the soul of man, as it is at present constituted, can not entirely abandon itself; it can not forget itself, and lose itself, either in simultaneous, or in two successive impressions of a precisely opposite character and of equal force. To attempt this is to do violence to its constitution.

If the subject of "Othello" had been perfectly unknown to the public, if the public could have freely allowed itself to be carried unresistingly along with the constant mysteriousness that is connected with Roderigo, the surprise and the wrath of Brabantio, the drunkenness of Cassio, and the ill-natured jokes of the buffoon, uttered in a strain of mere pleasantry, it would from the first have as-

cended to the proper elevation of gladness and hilarity; but the shock could not but be unpleasant to them when they were so soon to pass abruptly from this gay and playful disposition to the terrible pathos of the gigantic scenes of jealousy which terminate the third act.

But as they, on the contrary, had entered the theatre with their expectations directed entirely to those scenes of jealousy, and to other scenes not less terrible, which were to grow out of these, as they were anxiously looking forward to the catastrophe, two or more acts full of sarcasms, facetiæ, and jokes appeared to the public a severe trial, a somewhat grim preparation; they saw in it something not merely contrary, but opposed and shocking to their tastes, something which overshot the mark, whatever that mark may be.

Were they wrong? Was this mere prejudice? We, for our part, can hardly think so.

The mixture of comedy and tragedy is not, or certainly ought not to be, a purely arbitrary thing. The two are not brought together merely for the sake of the union. Opposition, antithesis, in works of art, is not in itself a merit, has no intrinsic value. They are brought together when a certain kind of beauty results naturally from their juxtaposition; they are united because, in the vicinity of those events which change and reverse an entire life, there are the world, society, and the crowd of indifferent egotists who move on without caring for these events, whose movements are neither disturbed nor disarranged by them, who pursue their individual interests, ruled by their habits, abandoned to selfishness; and because the contrast between situations of such an opposite character, and sentiments so unlike to one another, after it has compelled us to smile, opens to us a point of view from which human

life is seen shaded with a fanciful and melancholy tinge. Comedy and tragedy are blended, because a flash of unpremeditated gayety sometimes crosses the minds of those who are corroded by remorse or stricken by despair, and restores them for an instant to a state which is lost to them—irremediably and hopelessly lost—leaving them immediately afterward, as a ray of light which only glittered for a moment to exhibit more clearly the depth of the abyss :

Nessun maggior dolore
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
Nella miseria.

The two are blended, because the same fact often presents varying aspects, and the waning light, which exhibits the one, brings the other into bolder relief. Lastly, they are blended, because an accidental link is often found to connect a terrible misfortune with a fantastic incident—some singular relation which involuntarily and unexpectedly takes hold upon us, and which our spirit not unwillingly grasps as if to find some kind of unbending to regain its equilibrium and recover breath.

Never should the contrast be allowed unless under the condition that the dominant impression, which is chiefly to be regarded, should be developed and not destroyed, should not be lost sight of, but rendered more lasting and profound. No one knew this better than Shakspeare, no one has illustrated it by more numerous and beautiful examples. But we confess we can not find them in "Othello." In this play the comic element is purely arbitrary ; it is, in some sort, appended to the tragic, while there is no intimate relation between the one and the other, no common aim, no alliance to be ratified by the deep experiences of the soul.

Let Roderigo be eliminated from the piece—a genuine melodramatic simpleton, who only appears that he may serve as a butt to Iago, to be beduped and befooled by him; you can do so; what Roderigo does might be done quite as well by any one else; no one, Iago excepted, would know or care for his absence. Let Brabantio, the firm and prudent senator, full of ability and self-possession, dignified and respected, be true to his proper character; let him not be transformed, during the two whole scenes, merely to suit the whim of the author, into a Géronte or a Sganarelle. Let Cassio fall into disgrace with his general from some more worthy motive than that supplied by taking a glass of wine at an unseasonable time, which would also be much more in keeping both with his good qualities, and with the defects which are attributed to him. Lastly, erase entirely the part of the clown, a part so false that the French imitator, though he has in general adhered most conscientiously to the original, did not think himself bound to preserve it; all that is comic in the piece will have disappeared, it will have disappeared without being observed at all by any of the essential characters, without producing any chasms in the representation of the principal positions; it may be detached, as two objects are separated which have nothing in common but the circumstance of their both being in the same vessel.

This is assuredly quite sufficient to explain the impression produced upon the spectators; they might, without any injustice, have shown a greater degree of severity, and doubtless they would have done so if they had had to express themselves upon the work as one entirely unknown to them. But they were placed, as we have already said, in a more rational point of view than that occupied by the French translator; they had come, not to behold a mar-

vel, but to study, with a true and living sympathy, an ancient and renowned work. They were unpleasantly surprised at first, but they showed patience, and gave due credit. One circumstance, we think, proves most convincingly the freedom of their minds and the docility of their attention, the fact that this deluge of tiresome pleasantries did not at all injure the effect of the three beautiful scenes in the first act—the scene in which Othello calmly meets the violent passion of Desdemona's father ; that in which he explains to the Senate how he managed to conquer the young girl's heart ; and that in which Desdemona herself appears, and demands to be permitted to follow the Moor, as her lord and master, to Cyprus.

The effect of Othello's narration was irresistible. This portion of the play is translated into all languages—its beauty is perfectly entrancing, its originality is unequaled. Even La Harpe could not refuse to it the tribute of his admiration. But perhaps the scene which precedes and that which follows are even still more adapted to exhibit Shakspeare in all his greatness. How wonderful a painter of human nature was this man ! How true is it that he has received from on high something of that creative power which, by breathing on a little dust, can transform it into a creature of life and immortality !

In the interview with Brabantio, Othello only utters some fifteen lines ; before the Senate, Desdemona only about thirty ; and yet already both Othello and Desdemona stand before us as complete characters : there they both are, showing themselves without any constraint, in all the gracefulness and singularity of their characters, in all their native and imperishable individuality. Suppress the rest of the piece, you can never efface Desdemona and Othello from your memory ; place them, if you please, in

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another order of circumstances, use your utmost, but do not think you can obliterate them ; we know them, and we know beforehand what they must do and say.

And yet what complexities, what contrasts, what delicate shades, belong to these characters !

In Othello there are two individualities : in the first place, there is the savage, who has for a long time remained alone ; who has for a long time lived the life of a brute, and who abandons himself, without even the smallest indication of an internal struggle, to the first effervescence of passion which crosses his soul ; a man who is yet furnished with that interior goodness, that native generosity which the instinct of our poetic fictions has been pleased to attribute to the lion, the monarch of the deserts. In the second place, there is the civilized man, who has become such by war, and by war alone, by the greatness of his courage, by that self-possession which is educated and disciplined by constant, habitual, and regular familiarity with danger. In the amenities of a peaceful life the civilized man is naturally and spontaneously uppermost ; Othello is calm, confident in the superiority of his character, in the haughtiness of his spirit, in the magnitude of his services ; but he obeys the first signal, he marches at the first word of command—his discipline is that of the soldier, his moderation is that of the tamed animal. He has captivated Desdemona's young heart by an unexpected turn of fortune, the very possibility of which belongs solely to the region of poetry, the reality of which is inconceivable by vulgar minds : as Iago says, " What delight shall she have to look on the devil ? " But this stroke of fortune appeared quite simple to him, an unreflecting and unsuspecting being ; it has not cost him one step, not one moment of disquietude ; he has not stopped to think of his

age, his appearance, or the rudeness of his manners. He possesses Desdemona as his property, as he possesses his good sword, not imagining that his claims to her can be disputed in any other way than by brute force. He is, therefore, at rest. If, however, he gives himself up to love, love is yet only an accident of his existence; war is his life, his element, the stage on which his character really acts; love can only thwart his true destiny; meanwhile, he neither knows how to rule it, nor how thoroughly to receive its influence.

Desdemona, on the other hand, is the most perfect ideal, the purest type of woman—of woman as she is in herself, a being inferior and yet divine, subordinate by the order of human life, free before her choice is made, but the slave of her choice when once she has made it. She is composed of modesty, tenderness, and submission. Her modesty is unsullied, her tenderness is unbounded, her submission is unlimited and absolute. That which distinguishes her among all other women is that she does not so much possess these qualities as they possess and absorb her. In her soul there is no place for any thing else, whether it be indifferent, or bad, or even good; there is no room for other inclinations, other feelings, or even other duties. She has given herself up entirely, body and soul, thought and will, hope and memory. Nothing remains in her nature which she can appropriate to any thing else whatever. She forsakes her father, she deceives him, she braves him, as far as she can brave any thing—his exasperated feelings, his exterior harshness—but without any exhibition of either hesitation or repentance. The very appearance of the object of her choice may convince us how chaste are her thoughts. There is not the least allusion, either as to the kind of life that awaits her, nor as to

the possible price which she may one day pay for such affection ; from the first she is resigned—resigned to all—certain of what was to be her lot in the world—certain that, whatever may arrive, she will never cast back one look of regret—that she will never have to hesitate between two courses.

And, in order that we may be put in possession of all this, what was required from Shakspeare ? Four strokes of his pen complete the work. See, for example, how he concludes the scene.

The Moor has been dragged from the very steps of the altar by Brabantio ; since the moment of their union he has hardly been able to exchange two words with the object of his best love. The simple and pathetic recital of their passion has disarmed all hearts and drawn tears from every eye. Desdemona has just resisted the authority of her father with mildness and moderation, but with invincible firmness. The duke confirms their happiness—the father delivers his daughter up to the Moor ; all the senators surround them and wish them joy ; Desdemona is allowed to rejoin her husband at Cyprus as soon as he shall be settled there. The duke then says to the old soldier,

“The affair cries—haste !

And speed must answer it. You must hence to-night.”

The only words which escape Desdemona are

“To-night, my lord ?”

Othello’s answer is,

“With all my heart.”

He has heard the sound of the trumpet, and all other thoughts are already far away. Desdemona, the tender, loving girl, so resolute when in the presence of her father

—Desdemona, who has scarcely entered into the bonds of wedlock, casts down her eyes, and follows timidly after her husband, without uttering one word, without directing to him one significant look, without framing any reproach in her heart.

Othello's narrative has been rapturously applauded—as was most natural ; but the united impression of the three scenes must obtain, we think, an admiration of an entirely different kind. Imagine a man who has lived for a long time in rooms lighted only by wax-candles, chandeliers, or colored glasses—who has only breathed in the faint, suffocating atmosphere of drawing-rooms, who has seen only the cascades at the opera, calico mountains, and garlands of artificial flowers : imagine such a man suddenly transported, one magnificent July morning, to a region where he could breathe the purest air, under the tranquil and graceful chestnut-trees which fringe the waters of Interlachen, and within view of the majestic glaciers of the Oberland, and you will have a pretty accurate idea of the moral position of one accustomed to the dramatic representations which formerly occupied our stage, when he unexpectedly finds himself witnessing these so simple, grand, and natural beauties.

A second point with respect to which the involuntary feeling of the French public has found itself at issue with Shakspeare's admirers is the character of Iago. This character, which is the concealed agent producing the catastrophe of the piece, is greatly celebrated in England and elsewhere ; all the critics, without exception, English, German, or French, are unwearying in their eulogies upon it. When acted, it appeared to us that this character was generally disapproved, and that in a very marked way, which kept on increasing with every act : so much so

that, had it not been played with great firmness and determination, it would certainly have received some decided rebuff. Why was this?

It was rather curious, at the end of every act, to hear each spectator give the reason of his repugnance, the cause of his aversion. One thought Iago too immoral; another, on the contrary, thought he was not a sufficiently accomplished hypocrite; he should not boast so offensively of his wickedness, said a third censor; while a fourth was revolted at seeing him perpetrate his crimes with so much pleasantry. And so on.

In our judgment, the part was disapproved because it is in itself bad; because it is, we do not say inconsistent (for what is more natural to man than inconsistency?), but incoherent; because the parts of which it is composed do not naturally associate; and because, in regard to it, we are uncertain which idea to adopt. Such, at least, is our mode of viewing it. Let Shakspeare's devotees anathematize us, if they feel disposed.

What really is Iago? Is he the Evil Spirit, or at least his representative on earth? Is Othello right when he looks down to his feet to see whether they are not cloven? Is he a being who can do evil from the mere love of it, and who deliberately breathes a poisonous atmosphere into the union of Othello and Desdemona solely because Desdemona is a being of angelic purity, and Othello is a loyal, brave, and generous man.

If so, why ascribe to Iago any human and interested motives? Why are we pointed to his low cupidity, the resentment which he feels for an injury done to his honor, his envy of a position more elevated than his own? Why must we see him plundering poor Roderigo, as Scapin or Sbrigani jiggle the purse out of the pocket of some imbe-

cile? The introduction of these passions destroy every thing that is fantastic in the part. The devil has neither humor nor honor; he has neither rancor, nor rage, nor covetousness; he is a disinterested person; he does evil because it is evil, and because he is the Evil One.

Iago, on the other hand, is, as he himself boasts, the type of an egotist—a man who is perfected in the art of self-love—a being who can arrange his desires in hierarchical subordination, according to the degree of their importance, and then so plan his actions as that they shall invariably turn out to his infinite satisfaction, whatever may be the consequences to other people, without scrupulosity, without remorse, and also without allowing himself to be diverted from his aim by any temptation of an inferior order.

Why, then, does he pursue, at the same time, three or four different ends, which are to him of very unequal importance? Why does he undertake successively twenty different projects which he abandons one after the other? Why especially does he, on every occasion, lavish his villainy with a hundred times greater prodigality than is called for by the circumstances? Jonathan Wild the Great, notorious in the lists of rascality, was much more expert when he said, "Be chary with your crimes; they are far too good things to be squandered away in pure waste."

Moreover, how are we to reconcile the different ideas which are given us of this character? He is first represented to us as an intrepid, intelligent soldier, worthy of all the confidence of Othello and the Senate, who might judiciously have been promoted to a high rank; and then he is exhibited before us as a sharper of the first quality, and as a miserable ruffian.

He has a profound contempt for the human race, and,

in the human race, he has a profound contempt for women ; he shrugs his shoulders at the bare suggestion of the possibility of female honor. His own wife, especially, is an insupportable burden to him. His only aim in the world is fortune—his enjoyments are palpable and material—and yet we are required to see, in the mere suspicion of an old intrigue between his wife and Othello, a force powerfully acting upon and moving his soul !

He is presented as the most artful villain that ever existed, and yet all his projects are so ill-contrived, so clumsy, so destitute of foresight, that not one of them succeeds—neither was it possible that they could be successful.

He is presented as an impostor of fearful penetration, capable of impenetrable dissimulation ; and yet the traps that he sets are so palpable that, although he has to do with an idiot, in comparison with whom any pig-headed imbecile would be a marvel of perspicacity, every one possessed of the smallest relic of sense would not allow himself to be decoyed by them for the space of two minutes.

This, forsooth, is his scheme ! Desdemona has espoused Othello ; she has chosen him, as he is, out of a thousand others more worthy of her ; she has left all for him ; to all appearance she loves him ; Iago himself does not doubt it ; hardly have they received the nuptial benediction before they are separated ; Othello sets out with Cassio—observe, with Cassio ; Desdemona also departs for Cyprus ; by accident the two parties, who had left Venice at different times, arrive in Cyprus the same day, within half an hour of one another. To the knowledge and in the sight of all, Othello included, Cassio, the companion of his voyage, has not been able to speak to Desdemona more than ten minutes on the public road. And yet on the afternoon of this same day, in the midst of the first transports of a union

which has been for so long a time retarded, Iago takes upon himself to persuade the amorous Othello that Desdemona, the gentle Desdemona, has betrayed him, before even she has belonged to him—that she has delivered up her heart and her person—to whom?—to Cassio, who has been able neither to see her nor to converse with her. . And Iago speaks of his passion as a thing already ancient, and yet—and yet as a thing posterior to her marriage with Othello; for he represents Cassio as exclaiming,

“Cursed fate, that gave thee to the Moor!”

and Iago speaks of Cassio’s intrigue with innumerable details and interminable explanations.

Which is the greatest simpleton, the man who conceives such a project, or the man who allows himself to be entrapped by it?

Will it be said that he succeeded? He succeeded according to the representation of the author; but what will common sense say of the matter?

The author is himself successful: but why? Because, such is the intensity and vivacity of his original conception, that the most revolting improbabilities, the most inconceivable absurdities, pass by unperceived; because no one is so ungracious, no one has time to notice the stratagems of the drama. It is, however, another thing to offer these absurdities to be admired as merits.

And yet that is not without truth: from that moment when the first insinuation escapes the lips of Iago, and reaches the ears of the Moor—from the utterance of those fatal words, “Ay, well said, whisper; with as little a web as this will I ensnare as great a fly as Cassio”—to that awful moment when the curtain falls on the corpses of the two lovers, the spectator is in a state of breathless

expectation. You might hear the flight of a gnat across the room, and those are ill-judged spirits whose zeal compels them to interrupt by their applause the anxiety which is momentarily increasing.

In that first word all has been said, all has been determined. Farewell forever to Desdemona! Farewell to Othello! Desdemona only appears henceforth as the innocent bird struggling feebly in the grasp of a vulture, but of a vulture who is himself furiously struggling under the grasp of another vulture, and who avenges himself by his treatment of his unhappy victim for the frightful tortures which he is suffering in his own person.

The spectator looks upon this picture, not with that restless curiosity which passes alternately from fear to hope, but, if we may say so—and we do it fully sensible that there are important differences—with something of that inexpressible anguish which absorbs us when, in a court of justice, we are watching the vain efforts of a criminal who is being hurried along to a fatal and inevitable condemnation.

Othello has never thought, has never had occasion to think, how strange, how incomprehensible is the sentiment which he has inspired in Desdemona; now for the first time he thinks of it:

“Haply, for I am black,
And have not those soft parts of conversation
That chamberers have; or, for I am declined
Into the vale of years.”

One irregular taste, Iago suggests to him, indicates other irregularities. Beyond a doubt she is lost—“she’s gone.”

This first suspicion, to use Schlegel’s energetic language, is “a drop of poison in his veins, and sets his whole blood in the wildest ferment.” The savage is again uppermost.

The civilized portion of his nature, which has never met him in this region, which has only subdued him on the field of battle, is powerless to hold him in check. The struggle goes on for some moments; for some moments does Othello, the warrior, the statesman, the lord of others and of himself, attempt to treat his own love as a sportive flame, his jealousy as a folly.

“Exchange me for a goat,
When I shall turn the business of my soul
To such exsufflicate and blown surmises.

* * * *

No, Iago;
I'll see before I doubt; when I doubt, prove;
And, on the proof, there is no more but this—
Away at once with love and jealousy.

* * * *

Look here, Iago;
All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven.
'Tis gone!’

But his efforts are vain; his defiance is fruitless; at the first onslaught he sees his mighty courage fail, at the first shock of battle he knows himself to be vanquished; he turns a last fond look toward that which has so long charmed him; he remembers dreamily the courser and the trumpet, the assault and the victory:

“O now forever
Farewell the tranquil mind, farewell content!
Farewell the pluméd troop, and the big wars,
That make ambition virtue! O, farewell!
Farewell the neighing steed and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife,
The royal banner; and all quality,
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!
And O, you mortal engines, whose rude throats
The immortal Jove's dread clamors counterfeit,
Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone!’

After this cry, all the struggle within him ceases.

In proportion as jealousy spreads its ravages in this spirit which is already wrecked, we can watch the re-appearance under all the most hideous forms of the semi-brutish nature ; we may see its growth ; we may hear its roar ; a creature not to be controlled by reason, deaf to the accents of truth, insensible to utterances of tenderness, unapproachable by moral evidence, which, in the wildness of its fury, passes from one extreme to another, now delighting, with savage joy, in its own detailed recital, in terms of the most revolting barbarity, of the outrage which it contemplates, crying out,

“ O, blood, Iago, blood ! ”

And then, in conclusion, falling, without knowing how or why, from rage down to despair.

Humanity has altogether forsaken him, except it be in his frequently returning fits of emotion, pity, or regret ; but these are always provoked by the remembrance of Desdemona's charms—by ideas which are connected with sensual enjoyments ; and perhaps, also, it may yet lurk in certain glimmerings of a rough equity, such as may be found under the Bedouin's tent or in a bandit's cavern : “ For she had eyes and chose me.” And when Iago proposes to him to “ strangle her in her bed, even the bed she hath contaminated,” he replies, “ Good, good ; the justice of it pleases ; very good.”

There is, however, no trace of the sentiments which he ought to have imbibed by his connection with civilized and polite society ; no respect for himself or for others, no remembrance of kindnesses ; he gives directions for a base act of assassination—that of Cassio ; he strikes Desdemona brutally, in presence of the messengers of the Senate and of his own officers, in public, and in his own pri-

vate interviews with her ; he treats her as the most abandoned of women, heaping upon her the bitterest sarcasms and the most degrading epithets.

The sight of an heroic soul thus debased by its ferocity down to the level of the mere animal would almost of necessity contaminate the dignity of art, had not the poet brought it into constant contrast with the graceful, pure, and truly celestial figure of Desdemona. Never has any artist portrayed with greater delicacy that astonishment which is felt by an innocent soul when, for the first time, the overflow of its warm affection is repulsed by a hard word or a severe look—its timid efforts to turn the repulse into wanton playfulness, to renew a tender and free exchange of sentiment and thought, to exercise for some moments that pleasant and transient ascendancy which shall afford the young spouse many bright recollections in days yet to come.

In proportion as this new character of Othello develops itself, we may see (so to speak)—through that transparent poetry of which Shakspeare alone possesses the secret—the mild countenance of Desdemona gradually lose its serenity. The first idea that presents itself to her mind is, that Othello's roughness—that roughness for which she had prepared herself long before—has somewhat too soon made its appearance. But her heart is immediately resigned—she has an excuse ready at hand :

“ Nay, we must think men are not gods ;
Nor of them look for such observances
As fit the bridal.”

And when Othello strikes her in public, she is content only to weep and to say, “ I have not deserved this.”

But when Othello bursts out into rage against her, when he loads her with outrageous reproaches, when he

reviles her as a shameless prostitute, her voice fails her ; the blood which rushes to her face stifles all utterance ; she sinks rather under the confusion of hearing such language than because it is Othello who addresses her : some feeble sighs, some useless protests, are her only defense ; she has seen her fate written in the terrific looks of her husband. She lowers her head, and directs Emilia to spread upon her couch her wedding-dress, in which she desires to be enshrouded ; she offers her breast to the knife as a "stainless sacrifice" (another of Schlegel's happy expressions), as a lamb which has been accustomed only to bound and frolic in its native meadows, and which walks to the altar without knowing why, and licks the hand which is conducting it thither.

This it is precisely which explains the inexpressible charm and painful interest of this scene, which we have already alluded to ; a scene which, placed entirely apart from this, would transgress the proper limits of a work of art.

Othello, when he has taken leave of the messengers of the Senate, says, with a rugged, severe tone of voice, to Desdemona, "Get you to bed on the instant ; I will be returned forthwith ; look it be done." Her reply is, "I will, my lord." This is the sentence of death, and she knows it ; but not even a thought of disobedience enters her mind ; she does not dream of securing the least assistance : Othello has spoken.

The scene in which she undresses herself, before retiring to her bed, is then most truly for her that respite of a quarter of an hour which is granted to criminals before they are conducted to punishment. In vain does she attempt to suggest a different mood to Emilia, or to practice deception upon herself by turning her thoughts to any trifling

subjects that may arise : the inmost conviction of her soul rises in rebellion against every word. And, for the agitated spectator, this scene is of a similar character ; he counts the minutes, he clings to the least thing, he asks impatiently why there is still no other knot to untie, no other clasp to unloose ; his wishes would almost urge him to take hold on Desdemona's robe and save her from impending fate.

Tragic poets, behold your master ! learn a lesson from him, if you can !

The scene in which the Moor kills Desdemona surprised the public ; but their surprise was not of long duration, and was soon changed into fullest approval. Accustomed as they were to see this scene lengthened out in Rossini's opera—to watch the imposing attitudes of Madame Pasta, or the efforts of Madame Malibran, to save her life, the brevity of the English original at first astonished them. But, at the same time, the dialogue, so concise, so rapid, moving so directly to the mark—those ambiguous, and, at the same time, distracted words which Othello mutters in suppressed tones of voice ; that inexorable determination which he has made, and which he executes with agitated haste, with bursting heart and teeth closely set, hardly daring to look upon his victim, but without even a momentary wavering—Desdemona's entreaties, short, tender, timid : so much so, that they only show her concern for life ; her replies, in which all the bold confidence of innocence declares itself, when Othello alludes to her handkerchief, which had been found on Cassio :

“ He found it there ! ”

and, when Othello declares to her that Cassio has confessed his crime :

"He will not say so."

Words of simple sublimity, which Mademoiselle Mars renders with an accent of corresponding simplicity and sublimity; those cries from without which hasten the fatal stroke, and, as it were, nerve the arm of Othello—all this was most deeply felt, applauded as far as the emotion which it caused would allow, and—if we may say so without suggesting any comparison that would be invidious—the tragic scene appeared as superior to the lyric scene as the tragedy of Othello itself is superior to the libretto which is sold for thirty sous at the entrance of the Opéra Bouffon.

Immediately after this scene an incident follows which, we are perfectly aware, has been much applauded by all critics, which is greatly celebrated in all modern poetical criticism, which is even strongly commended by philosophers as an inimitable touch of nature.

Emilia enters the chamber, and Desdemona in her last moments yet finds enough strength left to accuse herself of her own death, and to exculpate Othello:

"Nobody: I myself: Farewell!

Commend me to my kind lord: Oh, farewell!"

We must give our testimony that there was no effect whatever produced by these words, and we will freely confess that we should always doubt whether there ought to be any.

Let the critics fulminate against us, let them, if they will, lanch their thunder-bolts against us; but it has always appeared to us that this short passage betrays a theatrical artifice, and that here it is the poet who speaks to us through the mouth of his character. It has always appeared to us that this last expiring utterance of Desdemona involves an idea far too complicated, far too refined

—a prevision, a precaution, which harmonize neither with her position, nor even with her character.

Since the day of her marriage, Desdemona has regarded herself as Othello's property—as a thing of which Othello is the absolute master, to use or abuse at his pleasure—as a slave whom he may beat or kill, according as his fancy may lead him ; how then came she to think all at once that Othello could run any risk so far as she was concerned, or that it was necessary to place him under shelter from a criminal prosecution ? Let her kiss Othello's hand when dying ; this is quite in keeping with her character—but for her to give her evidence in his favor, by anticipating the proceedings in a court of justice, is not.

Whether we are right or wrong is yet to be seen ; this, however, is of little importance. For the fact we can vouch—we repeat it—that these words made little or no impression.

On the other hand, we can hardly say enough in praise of the last scene—a scene about which the critics say little, but which is, in our humble opinion, one of the most admirable in the whole piece, and which produced an impression worthy of its transcendent beauty.

Hardly has Desdemona breathed out her last sigh, scarcely has the blind fury of Othello satiated himself, when the scene changes, his reason returns, the light of truth bursts upon him like a flood, and encounters him on all sides. Not by the explanations of Emilia is he undeceived, nor even by the confessions of Iago. Half an hour previously he would not have listened to any thing of the kind, but now he anticipates it all.

Even as he had attempted at first to summon his good sense and firmness to his assistance, against the first assaults of jealousy, so now he attempts to summon his fren-

zy and blind infatuation to his assistance, against the clamorous reproaches of his reason. He cries out with affected brutality, when speaking of Desdemona :

“She’s, like a liar, gone to burning hell,
’Twas I that killed her.”

He calls with vaunting impetuosity upon Iago,

“Honest, honest Iago !”

to afford him shelter and protection ; he constrains himself to recount once more the baseness which he has always before spoken of in accents of wild fury ; but now his language is involuntarily changed :

“’Tis pitiful ; but yet Iago knows
That she with Cassio has the act of shame
A thousand times committed.”

Vain efforts ! he is at length compelled to contemplate himself as he really is. Deprived of a being of spotless goodness, whom he adored, he now sees himself as others see him, the object not only of horror, but also of derision and contempt. Such epithets as calumniator, murderer, assassin, are too gentle for him—he is an infuriated madman, an enraged wild beast, a bull goaded by the gad-fly, or which has thrown itself, with determination to trample under its feet and to gore with its horns, upon a piece of red cloth which a malicious hand has placed before its eyes. He is in exactly the same position as Ajax, in Sophocles, at the moment when he recovers his senses, after his unhappy mania has departed.

Such words as

“O, gull ! O, dolt !
As ignorant as dirt !”

are showered down upon Othello from all sides. At first he holds down his head, abandoned to his self-recriminations—he is disarmed like a child.

N

"I am not valiant, neither,
But every puny whipster gets my sword."

But immediately he adds, and this relieves him,

"But why should honor outlive honesty?
Let it go, all."

And then,

"I have seen the day,
That, with this little arm and this good sword,
I have made my way through more impediments
Than twenty times your stop. But O, vain boast!
Who can control his fate? 'Tis not so now.
Be not afraid though you do see me weapon'd.
Here is my journey's end—here is my butt
And very sea-mark of my utmost sail.
Do you go back dismayed? 'Tis a lost fear:
Make but a rush against Othello's breast,
And he retires."

Then he falls upon the body of Desdemona, uttering wild, inarticulate cries, which it is impossible to hear without a shudder of grief and sympathy.

However, this paroxysm of humiliation and despair only lasts for a moment. Othello soon recovers his self-possession. In proportion as reason regains its empire in him, he, in his turn, regains his accustomed ascendancy over all the circumstances that surround him. Two or three stern and significant words show that he has determined in his own soul what course he shall pursue. He seizes another sword, and none of those present will dare now to deprive him of it. In the presence of Cassio, he excuses himself with nobleness and simplicity; he contemplates with a look of indifference, in which there is a mixture of disdain, the preparations made to secure his person; and when, at last, Ludovico advances toward him, and, in an already half-intimidated tone, orders him to be in readiness to take his departure to Venice, under a strong es-

court, in order to appear before the Senate, he interrupts him with the words,

"Soft you ; a word or two before you go."

See here, again, the mighty power of the poet ; how much he can indicate by a single stroke. Ludovico shall depart alone, such is Othello's determination ; Othello is not to go at all, such is his wish ; no one is to dispose of him but himself ; he will not hear one remark on this point. He then proceeds, in a strain of dignified sadness :

"I have done the state some service, and they know it ;
No more of that. I pray you, in your letters,
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am ; nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice ; then must you speak
Of one that loved, not wisely, but too well :
Of one not easily jealous ; but, being wrought,
Perplex'd in the extreme ; of one whose hand,
Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
Richer than all his tribe ; of one whose subdued eyes,
Albeit unused to the melting mood,
Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees
Their medicinal gum. Set you down this."

This said, and after having provided, as far as is possible for him, for his good name, he returns to self-revenge—he turns, with all the lofty pride of his indignant spirit, against that miserable body which he is about to chastise as a rebellious slave, as a ferocious animal which has dared to trample upon its master, and has thereby abandoned him to dishonor ; and, seeking for words expressive of the direst insult, which recall at once what he was, and the works of his life, and what he has always most bitterly despised, he says,

"And say, besides, that in Aleppo, once,
Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk

Beat a Venetian, and traduced the state,
I took by the throat the circumcised dog,
And smote him—thus."

We have dilated on the effect produced by this faithful and, we may say, literal translation of "Othello," because this effect seemed to us to augur very favorably for the French theatre. The piece was better played than any of the master-pieces of our dramatic writers is at this time; it has been better judged than any other piece, so far as we know, ever has been; for it has been judged sincerely, without prejudice, without any spirit of partisanship, and each scene has been estimated according to its true value.

If the public will resolutely maintain this freedom of mind, if they will continue henceforth, on every renewed attempt, to applaud only what seems to them to be good, to condemn that which strikes them as bad, to take up an attitude of indifference to things which are in themselves indifferent, it will, by these means, do much for art, and still more for its own gratification. It will save us the annoyance of an inundation of those imitations of the romantic school of the drama which already threaten to supersede the imitations of the classical school. After we have tried, for a hundred years, under a thousand different names, endless variations on the "Andromaque," the "Mérope," and the "Zaïre"—variations, however, which are devoid of all the beauties which belong to the originals—we shall be preserved from the misfortune of experiencing, under a thousand other names, and perhaps during another hundred years, mere repetitions of "Macbeth," "Othello," or "William Tell," minus the real beauties of "Macbeth," "Othello," and "William Tell."

The beautiful can never be the result of imitation: what

is really imitated are the defects, the exterior forms, the mannerism of great poets; and when the public, in its unreflecting enthusiasm for great poets, allows itself to applaud even their faults, or merely their mannerism, it is sure to have very soon more than enough of these.

Let those who are attached to the romantic school be well assured that this school will not establish itself among us by means of reversed reproductions of old works of art in a thin, transparent disguise, nor by counterfeits foisted upon us under the pretense of being borrowed. Let them traduce the beautiful productions of foreign literature, line by line; their work will not be thrown away; but, in Heaven's name, let them not produce these as novelties, and present them before us as fruits which are indigenous to their soil. They would not even have the excuse of their colleagues—originality must always be original. And let not the public allow themselves to be duped—never let them applaud a modern author merely because he can dress himself up in the plumage of a great master.

And let the friends of the classic school be well assured, in their turn, that their only chance of safety is in being able to rival the romantic school. It is now already dead—it has been slain by the copyists; imitations at second and third hand have filled us with an insurmountable disgust. It will revive—of this there can be no doubt; but its revival must be under a new and transformed appearance, released from the shackles by which it has been unreasonably entangled, free in its movements, prepared to enter upon a new career.

This service must be rendered to it by the existing romantic school.

That will be a happy time when we shall be able to see these two schools flourishing in the presence of each other,

in a reasonable degree of independence, governed, each for itself, by the laws appropriate to its true nature, and distributing with lavish hand the beauties which are their own native growths.

But it will be said, Do you then believe that the classic school has an actual existence—that it is not a mistake, a folly, as has been so often declared? Assuredly, we believe this. Do you think that the romantic school has its laws, and that it does not consist in the abnegation of all laws? Far from it. You do not regard as laws of the classic school those rules about which so much noise has been made? Not at all.

Explain yourself, then. Where is the line of demarkation between the two schools to be drawn? What is your idea of the classic, what of the romantic school? What are those laws of which you speak?

These are questions which we would very gladly answer; but time presses, and the amount of space which can be allotted to us in a review of this kind is already more than exhausted. We must, then, of necessity delay our answer till another opportunity. Moreover, the adherents of the romantic school have now a favorable breeze; and as besides, they do not lack expertness to find pretexts, the occasion will not long be wanting to us.

HISTORICAL DRAMAS.

SHAKSPEARE did not write his historical dramas in chronological order, and with the intention of reproducing upon the stage the great events and characters of the history of England, as they had been successively developed in fact. He had no idea of working on so general and systematic a plan. He composed his plays just according as some particular circumstance either suggested the idea, or inspired the whim, or imposed the necessity of composing them, never troubling himself about the chronology of the subjects, or about the uniform whole which certain works might form. He has introduced upon the stage nearly all the history of England from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, from John Lackland to Henry VIII. ; beginning with King Henry VI. and the fifteenth century, then ascending to King John and the thirteenth century, and finally ending with Henry VIII. and the sixteenth century, after having several times transposed the order of both centuries and kings. The following is the dramatic chronology of his six historical dramas, according to his most learned commentators, and among others, Mr. Malone :

1. The First Part of King Henry VI. (1422-1461), composed in 1569.
2. The Second Part of King Henry VI., composed in 1591.
3. The Third Part of King Henry VI., composed in 1591.
4. King John (1199-1216), composed in 1596.

5. King Richard II. (1377-1399), composed in 1597.
6. King Richard III. (1483-1485), composed in 1597.
7. The First Part of King Henry IV. (1399-1413), composed in 1598
8. The Second Part of King Henry IV., composed in 1598.
9. King Henry V. (1413-1422), composed in 1599.
10. King Henry VIII. (1509-1547), composed in 1601.

But, after having indicated with precision the chronological order of the composition of Shakspeare's historical dramas, we must, in order properly to appreciate their character and dramatic connection, replace them in the true order of events. This I have done in the notices which I have written on these dramas; and thus alone can we really behold the genius of Shakspeare unfolding and giving new life to the history of his country.

KING JOHN.

(1596.)

IN choosing the reign of John Lackland as the subject of a tragedy, Shakspeare imposed upon himself the necessity of not scrupulously respecting history. A reign in which, as Hume says, "England was baffled and affronted in every enterprise," could not be represented in its true colors before an English public and an English court; and the only recollection of King John to which the nation could attach any value—I refer to Magna Charta—was not a topic likely to interest, in any great degree, such a queen as Elizabeth. Shakspeare's play accordingly presents only a summary of the last years of this disgraceful reign; and the skill of the poet is employed to conceal the character of his principal personage without disfiguring it, and to dissemble the color of events without altogether changing it. The only fact concerning which Shakspeare has distinctly adopted a resolution to substitute invention for truth is the relation of King John to France; and assuredly, all the illusions of national vanity were necessary to enable Shakspeare to describe, and the English to witness, Philip Augustus succumbing beneath the ascendancy of John Lackland. Such a picture might indeed have been presented to John himself when—living in total inactivity at Rouen, while Philip was regaining all his possessions in

France—he vauntingly said, “Let the French go on; I will retake in a day what it has cost them years to acquire.” All that which, in Shakspeare’s play, is relative to the war with France, seems to have been invented in justification of this gasconade of the most cowardly and insolent of princes.

In the rest of the drama, the action itself, and the indication of facts which it was impossible to dissemble, are sufficient to give us a glimpse of a character into the inmost recesses of which the poet did not venture to penetrate, and into which he could not have penetrated without disgust. But such a personage, and so constrained a manner of description, were not capable of producing a great dramatic effect; and Shakspeare has therefore concentrated the interest of his drama upon the fate of young Arthur, and has devolved upon Faulconbridge that original and brilliant part in which we feel that he takes delight, and which he never refuses to introduce into any of his works.

Shakspeare has presented the young Duke of Bretagne to us at that age at which it first became necessary to assert his rights after the death of King Richard—that is, at about twelve years old. We know that at the period to which Shakspeare’s tragedy refers Arthur was about twenty-five or twenty-six, and that he was already married, and an object of interest from his amiable and brilliant qualities, when he was taken prisoner by his uncle; but the poet felt how much more interesting the exhibition of weakness in conflict with cruelty became when exemplified in a child. And besides, if Arthur had not been a child, it would not have been allowable to put forward his mother in his place; and, by suppressing Constance, Shakspeare would, perhaps, have deprived us of the most

pathetic picture that he ever drew of maternal love—one of the feelings of which he evinced the profoundest appreciation.

But, at the same time that he rendered the fact more touching, he lessened the horror which it inspires by diminishing the atrocity of the crime. The most generally received opinion is, that Hubert de Bourg, who had promised to put Arthur to death only that he might save him, had, in fact, deceived the cruelty of his uncle by false reports and a pretended burial; but that John, on being informed of the truth, first withdrew Arthur from the Castle of Falaise, in which he was confined under Hubert's guardianship, and transferred him to the Castle of Rouen, whither he proceeded at night, and by water, had his nephew conveyed into his boat, stabbed him with his own hand, tied a stone to his body, and threw him into the river. Such an image would naturally be rejected by a true poet. Independently of the necessity of absolving his principal personage of so odious a crime, Shakspeare perceived how much more dramatic and conformable to the general nature of man the cowardly remorse of John, when he perceived the danger in which he was plunged by the report of his nephew's death, would be, than this excess of brutal ferocity; and certainly, the fine scene between John and Hubert, after the withdrawal of the lords, is amply sufficient to justify his choice. Besides, the picture which Shakspeare presents had too strong a hold upon his imagination, and had acquired too much reality in his eyes, for him not to be conscious that, after the incomparable scene in which Arthur obtains his safety from Hubert, it would be impossible to endure the idea of any human being laying hands on this poor child, and forcing him again to undergo the agony from which he has just escaped.

The poet also knew that the sight of Arthur's death, although less cruel, would be intolerable if accompanied, in the minds of the spectators, by the anguish which the thought of Constance would add to it; and he is, therefore, careful to inform us of the death of the mother before making us witness the death of the child; just as if, when his genius had conceived, to a certain degree, the painfulness of any particular feeling or passion, his tender heart became alarmed at it, and sought to modify it for its own sake. Whatever misfortune Shakspeare may depict, he almost invariably leads us to anticipate a still greater misfortune, before which his mind recoils, and which he spares us the unhappiness of beholding.

The character of the bastard Faulconbridge was suggested to Shakspeare by a drama of Rowley's, entitled "The Troublesome Reign of King John," which appeared in 1591, that is, five years before Shakspeare's play, which was composed, it is believed, in 1596. Rowley's play was reprinted in 1611, with Shakspeare's name attached to it—rather a common trick of the booksellers and publishers of that time. This circumstance, and the extent to which Shakspeare has borrowed from this work, has led several critics to believe that he had had a hand in it, and that "The Life and Death of King John" was only a recast of the first work; but it does not appear that this supposition has any foundation in fact.

According to his custom, while borrowing whatever he pleased from Rowley, Shakspeare has added great beauties to his original, and has retained nearly all its errors. Thus, Rowley supposed that it was the Duke of Austria who killed Richard Cœur-de-Lion, and at the same time he makes the Duke of Austria perish by the hand of Faulconbridge, an historical personage whom Matthew Paris

mentions under the name of Falcasius de Breaute, the natural son of King Richard, and who, according to Holinshed, slew the Viscount of Limoges, in revenge for the death of his father, who, it is well known, was killed at the siege of Chaluz, a fortress belonging to that nobleman. In order to reconcile Holinshed's version with his own, Rowley has made Limoges the family name of the Duke of Austria, whom he designates as "Limoges, duke of Austria." Shakspeare has copied him exactly in this part of his story. He also attributes the murder of Richard to the Duke of Austria; in his play, also, the Duke of Austria falls by the hand of Faulconbridge; and, as regards the confusion of the two personages, it would appear that Shakspeare was as unscrupulous about it as Rowley, if we may judge from Constance's speech to the Duke of Austria in the first scene of the third act, in which she addresses him as "O Lymoges! O Austria!" The character of Faulconbridge is one of those creations of Shakspeare's genius in which we discover the nature of all times and of all countries. Faulconbridge is the true soldier, the soldier of fortune, personally recognizing no inflexible duty but that which he owes to the chief to whom he has devoted his life, and from whom he has received the rewards of his valor; and yet a stranger to none of those feelings upon which other duties are founded, and even obeying the instincts of natural rectitude whenever they do not come into contradiction with the vow of implicit fidelity and submission to which his existence, and even his conscience, is devoted. He will be humane, generous, and just, whenever this vow does not ordain him to practice inhumanity, injustice, and bad faith; he forms a correct judgment of the things to which he is subject, and is in error only regarding the necessity of subjecting himself

to them. He is as skillful as he is brave, and does not alienate his judgment while renouncing its guidance: he is a man of powerful nature, whom circumstances, and the necessity of employing his activity in some way or other, have reduced to a moral inferiority, from which a calmer disposition, and profounder reflections upon the true destination of man, would most probably have preserved him. But, with the fault of not having sought the objects of his fidelity and devotion in a sufficiently lofty sphere, Faulconbridge possesses the eminent merit of unchangeable fidelity and devotion, two singularly lofty virtues, both as regards the feeling from which they emanate and the great actions of which they may be the source. His language is, like his conduct, the result of a mixture of good sense and ardor of imagination, which frequently involves his reason in a jumble of words very natural to men of Faulconbridge's profession and character; being incessantly exposed to the shock of the most violent scenes and actions, they can not find in ordinary language the means of conveying the impressions which compose the habit of their life.

The general style of the play is less firm and decided in color than that of several other tragedies by the same poet; the contexture of the work is also rather vague and feeble, but this is the result of the absence of one leading idea, which should continually direct all the parts of the drama toward the same centre. The only idea of this kind which can be discerned in "King John" is the hatred of foreign dominion gaining the victory over the hatred of tyrannical usurpation. In order for this idea to be salient, and constantly to occupy the mind of the spectator, it would be necessary for it to be reproduced in every direction, and for every thing to contribute to give conspicuity to the

misfortune of a conflict between the two feelings. But this plan, which would be rather vast for a dramatic work, was, moreover, irreconcilable with the reserve which Shakspeare had imposed upon himself with regard to the character of the king; and thus a great part of the play is passed in discussions of but little interest, and in the remainder the events are not well arranged; the lords change sides too lightly, first on account of the death of Arthur, and afterward from motives of personal alarm, which does not present their return to the cause of England under a sufficiently honorable point of view. The poisoning of King John, moreover, is not prepared with that care which Shakspeare usually bestows upon the foundation and justification of the slightest circumstances in his dramas; and there is nothing to indicate the motive which could have led the monk to commit so desperate an action, as at that moment John was reconciled to Rome. The tradition from which Shakspeare has borrowed this apocryphal anecdote ascribes the monk's conduct to a desire to revenge an offensive epithet which the king had used regarding him. We can not tell what could have induced Shakspeare to adopt this story, which he has turned to so little account; perhaps he desired to mingle with John's last moments something of infernal suffering, without having recourse to remorse, which, in fact, would not have been in more accordance with the real character of this contemptible prince than with the modified delineation of it which the poet has supplied.

KING RICHARD II.

(1597.)

IN proportion as Shakspeare advances toward the more modern times of the history of his country, the chronicles upon which he relies for information coincide more exactly with historical truth ; and already, in "The Life and Death of King Richard III.," the details furnished him by Holinshed differ only in a slight degree from the historical data which have been handed down to us as authentic. With the exception of the queen, who is a pure invention of the poet's imagination, and passing over the chronological disorder occasioned by Shakspeare's negligence in keeping events at a proper distance from each other, the facts contained in this tragedy differ in no respect from historical narratives of the same period, except with regard to the kind of death which Richard suffered. Holinshed, who copied other chroniclers, supplied Shakspeare with the story which he has followed ; but the most probable opinion, and that which is in most accordance with the care taken publicly to expose Richard's body after his death, is, that he was left to die of hunger. This attention to evade, at least, the material appearances of crime, while caring little to avoid suspicion, was beginning to be introduced into the ferocious politics of these times ; and Richard himself had stifled, beneath a mat-

tress, the Duke of Gloucester, whom he held prisoner in Calais, and had afterward announced that he had died of an attack of apoplexy. Besides Shakspeare's tendency to follow implicitly the historical guide whom he had once adopted, this version allowed him to preserve to the character of Bolingbroke that interest with which he has invested it, both in this drama and in the two parts of "King Henry IV." The choice between different versions of the same story, is, moreover, the least contested and the least contestable privilege of dramatic authors.

The tragedy of "Richard II." is then, generally speaking, sufficiently conformable to history; and the manner in which the poet has described the deposition of Richard, and the accession to the throne of Henry of Lancaster, appears singularly in accordance with what Hume says on the subject: "Henry IV. became king, nobody could tell how or wherefore." But it would be necessary to be like Hume, entirely unacquainted with the sight of revolutions, to be puzzled to say how and why the Duke of Lancaster, after having acted for some time in the name of the king, whom he kept prisoner, finally established himself without difficulty in his place. Shakspeare did not think it necessary to explain this; Richard left Flint Castle with the title of king, in the retinue of Bolingbroke; and we next see him signing his own deposition. The poet does not in any way indicate to us what has passed; but in order not to guess how the fall of Richard was accomplished it would be necessary for us to have very ill understood the picture presented to us of his first degradation; and the conversation of the gardener with his servants completes the description by revealing to us its effects upon public opinion. It was a characteristic of Shakspeare's art to make us present at every part of the event;

and he always transports us to the scene in which he strikes his most decisive blows, while at a distance from our view the action pursues its course, and contents itself with meeting us again when it has reached its consummation.

Although this tragedy is entitled "The Life and Death of King Richard II.," it only comprises the last two years of that prince's reign, and contains only a single event, namely, his downfall—the catastrophe toward which every circumstance tends from the very outset of the play. This event has been considered under different aspects, and a rather singular anecdote has revealed to us the existence of another tragedy on the same subject, anterior, as it would appear, to Shakspeare's drama, and treated in an altogether different point of view. Some of the partisans of the Earl of Essex, on the day preceding his extravagant enterprise, procured the performance of a tragedy in which, as in Shakspeare's drama, Richard II. was deposed and put to death on the stage. The actors having represented to them that the play was entirely out of fashion, and would not attract a sufficient audience to cover the expense of the performance, Sir Gilly Merriek, one of the confederates, gave them forty shillings above the receipts. This fact was mentioned at the trial of Sir Gilly, and served to procure his condemnation.

The conspiracy of the Earl of Essex occurred in 1601, and Shakspeare's tragedy appeared, it is believed, in the year 1597. Notwithstanding this precedence, no one will be disposed to suspect that one of Shakspeare's plays could have figured in a factious enterprise against Elizabeth. Besides, the drama in question seems to have been known by the name of "Henry IV.," and not by that of "Richard II.;" and there is reason to believe that the history

of Henry IV, was its true subject, and Richard's death only an incident. But in order to remove every kind of doubt, it is sufficient to read Shakspeare's tragedy; the doctrine of divine right is incessantly presented in it, accompanied by that interest which is excited by the aspect of the misfortunes of fallen greatness. If the poet has not given to the usurper that odious physiognomy which produces hatred and the dramatic passions, it is sufficient to read history to understand the cause of this.

This vagueness of the moral aspect under which men and things present themselves, and which does not allow the feelings to attach themselves vigorously to any one object, because they can rest upon nothing with satisfaction, is not a fact peculiar to Richard II. and his destiny, in the history of these disastrous times. Parties ever at conflict with each other for the supreme power, vanquished by turns, and always deserving their defeat, without any one of them having ever deserved victory, do not present a very dramatic spectacle, nor one very well calculated to elevate our feelings and faculties to that degree of exaltation which is one of the noblest objects of art. Pity is, in such a case, often wanting to indignation, and esteem almost always to pity. We have no difficulty in finding out the crimes of the strongest, but we look with anxiety for the virtues of the weakest; and the same effect is produced when the circumstances are changed: follies, depredations, injustice, and violence have led to Richard's downfall, and have even rendered it necessary; and they detach us from him by the two-fold reason that we behold him working out his own ruin, and that we find it impossible to save him. It would, however, be easy to discover at least as many crimes in the party which triumphs over his degradation. Shakspeare might, with little trouble,

have amassed against the rebels those treasures of indignation which would animate all hearts in favor of the legitimate sovereign ; but one of the principal characteristics of Shakspeare's genius is a truthfulness, I may say, a fidelity of observation, which reproduces nature as it is, and time as it actually occurs. History supplied him neither with heroes superior to their fortune, nor with innocent victims, nor with instances of heroic devotion or of imposing passion ; he merely found the very strength of his characters employed in the service of those interests which degrade them—perfidy considered as a means of conduct, treason almost justified by the dominant principle of personal interest, and desertion almost rendered legitimate by the consideration of the risk that would be run by remaining faithful ; and all this he has described. It is, in truth, the Duke of York, a personage of whose incapacity and nullity we are informed by history, whom Shakspeare has selected to represent this ever-ardent devotedness to the man who governs, this facility in transferring his obedience from rightful to actual power, and *vice versâ*, merely allowing himself, for his honor, to shed a few solitary tears on behalf of the monarch whom he has abandoned. To any one who has not witnessed the sport of fortune with empires, this personage would be only comic ; but to any one who has beheld such changes, does he not possess alarming truthfulness ?

Surrounded by characters of this kind, whence could Shakspeare derive that pathetic element which he would have loved to infuse into the spectacle of fallen greatness ? He who had given old Lear, in his misery, so many noble and faithful friends, could not find one for Richard ; the king had fallen, stripped and naked, into the hands of the poet, as he fell from his throne ; and in himself alone the

poet has been obliged to seek all his resources ; the character of Richard II. is, therefore, one of the profoundest conceptions of Shakspeare.

The commentators have had a great discussion as to whether it was from the court of James or of Elizabeth that Shakspeare derived the maxims which he so frequently professes in favor of divine right and absolute power. Shakspeare derived them ordinarily from his personages themselves ; and it was sufficient for him here to have to describe a king already seated on the throne. [Richard never imagined that he ever was, or could be, any thing but a king ; his royalty was, in his eyes, a part of his nature, one of the constituent elements of his being, which he brought into the world with him at his birth, subject to no conditions but his life ; as he had nothing to do to retain it, it was no more in his power to cease to be worthy of it than to cease to be invested with it ; and hence arose his ignorance of his duties to his subjects and to his own safety, and his indolent confidence in the midst of danger. Although this confidence abandons him for a moment at every new reverse, it returns immediately, doubling its force in proportion as he requires more of it to take the place of other props, which successively crumble away. When he has arrived at last at a point at which it is no longer possible for him to hope, the king becomes astonished, looks around, and inquires if he is really himself. Another kind of courage then springs up within him—the courage imparted by such a misfortune that the man who experiences it becomes excited by the surprise into which he is thrown by his own position ; it becomes to him an object of such lively attention, that he dares to contemplate it in all its bearings, were it only for the purpose of understanding it ; and by this contem-

plation he escapes from despair, and sometimes rises to truth, the discovery of which always calms a man to a certain degree. But this calmness is barren, and this courage inactive; it sustains the mind, but it is fatal to action; all the actions of Richard are, therefore, deplorably feeble: even his reflections upon his actual condition reveal a consciousness of his own nullity, which descends, at certain moments, almost to baseness; and who could raise a man who, on ceasing to be a king, has lost, in his own opinion, the distinctive quality of his being, the dignity of his nature? He believed himself precious in the sight of God, sustained by His arm, and armed with His power; when fallen from the mysterious rank which he had once occupied, he knows no place for himself upon earth: when stripped of the power which he believed his right, he does not suppose that any strength can remain to him: he, therefore, makes no resistance; to do so would be to try something which he believes impossible: in order to arouse his energy, some sudden and pressing danger must, as it were, provoke, without his knowledge, faculties which he disavows; when his life is attacked, he defends himself, and dies with courage; but in order always to have possessed courage, he needed to know what a man is worth.

We must not expect to find in "Richard II.," any more than in the majority of Shakspeare's historical dramas, a particular character of style. Its diction is not greatly elaborated; though frequently energetic, it is frequently also so vague as to leave the reason to decide as it pleases upon the meaning of the expressions, which can be determined by no rule of syntax.

This play is written entirely in verse, a great part of which is in rhyme. The author appears to have made

some changes in it after the first edition, which was published in 1597. The scene of Richard's trial, in particular, is entirely wanting in this edition, and occurs for the first time in that published in 1608.

FIRST AND SECOND PARTS

OF

KING HENRY IV.

(1597-1598.)

THE commentators have given to these two plays the title of comedies, and, in fact, although their subject belongs to tragedy, their intention is comic. In Shakspeare's tragedies, the comic sometimes arises spontaneously from the position of the personages introduced to assist the tragic action; here not only does a part of the action absolutely turn upon the comic personages, but most of those whose rank, the interest in which they are concerned, and the dangers to which they expose themselves, might raise them to the dignity of tragic personages, are presented under the aspect, which belongs to comedy, namely, under the weak or whimsical features of their nature. The almost puerile impetuosity of the fiery Hotspur, the brutal originality of his good sense, and his soldier-like ill temper with all who endeavor to detain his thoughts for a moment beyond the circle of the interests to which his life is devoted, give rise to some extremely piquant scenes. The Welshman, Glendower, boastful and vainglorious, as loquacious as he is brave, who makes head against Hotspur whenever he threatens or contradicts him, but who yields and retires whenever a pleasantry alarms his self-love with the fear of ridicule, is a truly comic conception. Even the

three or four words which Douglas utters are also characterized by a tinge of braggadocio. Neither of these three courages is expressed in the same way; but all yield to that of Hotspur, the comic hue of whose character does not detract in the slightest degree from the interest which he inspires. We become attached to him as to Alceste in the "Misanthrope"—to a great character who is the victim of a quality which the impetuosity of his temper and the preoccupation of his own ideas have turned into a defect. We see the brave Hotspur accepting the enterprise proposed to him before he knows its nature, as he feels certain of success as soon as he is struck with the idea of action; we see him successively losing all the supporters upon whom he had reckoned, abandoned or betrayed by those who have involved him in danger, and urged onward, as it were, by a sort of fatality toward the abyss which he does not perceive until the moment when he finds it impossible to draw back; and he falls regretting nothing but his glory. This is doubtless a tragical catastrophe, and the substance of the first part of the drama, the subject of which is the first step of Henry V. toward glory, required one of this kind; but the picture of the vagaries of the prince's youth, nevertheless, forms the most important part of the work, the principal character in which is Falstaff.

Falstaff is one of the most celebrated personages of English comedy, and perhaps no drama can present a gayer one. The description of the follies of a youth so disorderly as that of Henry V., at a time when manners were so coarse and rude, would be a very melancholy picture, if, in the midst of its uncouth debauchery, habits and pretensions of a higher order did not effect a contrast, and perform a part all the more amusing because it is so out of place. . It would have been very moral, undoubtedly,

to cast the ridicule of this impropriety upon the prince who thus degrades himself ; but, even if Shakspeare had not been the poet of the court of England, neither probability nor art would have permitted him to debase such a personage as Henry V. He is careful, on the contrary, always to preserve to him the dignity of his character and the superiority of his position ; and Falstaff, who is destined to amuse us, is admitted into the play only for the diversion of the prince.

Born to move in good society, Falstaff has not yet renounced all his pretensions of this kind ; he has not adopted the coarseness of the positions to which he is degraded by his vices ; he has given up every thing except his self-love ; he does not make a merit of his intemperance, nor does he base his vanity upon the exploits of a bandit. If there were any thing to which he would cling, it would be to the manners and qualities of a gentleman ; to this character he would pretend, if he were permitted to entertain, or able to maintain, a pretension of any kind. At least, he is determined to give himself the pleasure of affecting these qualities, even should the gratification of this pleasure gain him an affront ; though he neither believes in it himself, nor hopes that others believe in it, he must at any cost rejoice his ears with panegyrics upon his bravery, and almost upon his virtues. This is one of his weaknesses, just as the taste of Canary sack is a temptation which he finds it impossible to resist ; and the ingenuousness with which he yields to it, the embarrassments in which it involves him, and the sort of hypocritical impudence which assists him to get out of his dilemmas, make him an extraordinarily amusing personage. The play upon words, although frequent in this drama, are much less numerous than in several other dramas of a more se-

rious character, and are infinitely better placed. The mixture of subtlety, for which Shakspeare was indebted to the spirit of his time, does not prevent the gayety in this piece, as well as in those in which Falstaff reappears, from being perhaps more frank and natural than in any other work of the English drama.

The first part of "Henry IV." appeared, it is believed, in 1597.

Henry V. is the true hero of the second part; his accession to the throne, and the great change which results from it, constitute the event of the drama. The defeats of the Archbishop of York and of Northumberland are only the complement of the facts contained in the first part. Hotspur is no longer present to give these facts a life of their own, and the horrible treason of Westmoreland is not of a nature to establish a dramatic interest. The dying Henry IV. appears only to prepare the way for the reign of his son, and all our attention is already directed toward the successor, who possesses equal importance from the fears and hopes which he occasions.

Shakspeare has not borrowed the picture of these varied feelings entirely from history. The accession of Henry V. was generally a subject of rejoicing. Holinshed relates that, during the three days which followed the decease of his father, "diverse noblemen and honorable personages did to him homage, and swore to him due obedience, which had not been seen done to any of his predecessors—such good hope and great expectation was had of this man's fortunate success to follow."* The inconstant ardor of the public mind, which was maintained by frequent overthrows, necessarily rendered a new reign a subject of hope; and the troubles which had agitated the reign of

* Holinshed's Chronicles, vol. ii., p. 543.

Henry IV., the cruelties with which they had been attended, and the continual distrust which had resulted from them, naturally turned the eyes and the affections of the nation toward a young prince whose irregularities, at such a period of disorder, gave far less offense than his generous qualities inspired confidence. A portion of these irregularities was, moreover, ascribed to the jealous distrust of his father, who, by keeping him unconnected with public business, for which he had manifested great aptitude, and even denying him an opportunity to display his military talents, had cast his impetuous spirit into courses of disorder, in which the manners of the time did not permit him to pause until he had been guilty of its extremest excesses. Holinshed attributes to the malevolence of those who surrounded the king not only the suspicions which he was disposed to entertain regarding his son, but also the odious reports which were spread in reference to the conduct of the prince. He relates an occasion on which the prince, having to defend himself against certain insinuations which had created a misunderstanding between his father and himself, appeared at court with a retinue, the splendor and number of which were not calculated to diminish the suspicions of the king, and in a costume so singular that the chronicler thinks it worthy of special mention. It was "a gown of blue satin, full of small eyelet holes, at every hole the needle hanging by a silk thread with which it was sewn." Whatever may be thought would be the constraint of the movements of a person clad in so unprepossessing a manner, the prince threw himself at his father's feet, and, after having protested his fidelity, presented him with a dagger, that he might rid himself of his suspicions by putting him to death, and "in presence of these lords," he added, "and before God

at the general judgment, I faithfully protest clearly to forgive you." The king, "moved herewith, cast from him the dagger," embraced his son with tears in his eyes, confessed his suspicions, and declared, at the same time, that they were effaced. The prince demanded the punishment of his accusers, but the king replied that some delay was required by prudence, and did not punish them after all. But it appears that the general opinion sufficiently avenged the young prince; and without precisely believing with Holinshed, who contradicts himself in another place on this point, that Henry was always careful "to tether his affections within the tract of virtue,"* we are led to suppose that there may be some exaggeration in the account of the excesses of his youth, which are rendered more remarkable by the sudden revolution which brought them to a termination, and by the splendor of glory which followed them.

Shakspeare naturally adopted the tradition most favorable to dramatic effect; and he also felt how admirably adapted the part of a dying king and father, anxious about the fate of his son and his subjects, was to produce a touching and pathetic picture upon the stage; and, just as he has invented the episode of Gascoigne to enhance the beauty of his *dénouement*, he has added to the scene of the death of Henry IV. developments which render it infinitely more interesting. Holinshed simply relates that the king, perceiving that the crown had been taken from his pillow, and learning that the prince had carried it away, sent for him, and required an explanation of his conduct, "Upon which the prince with a good audacity answered, 'Sir, to mine and all men's judgments you seemed dead in this world, wherefore I, as your next heir-apparent, took that

* Holinshed's Chronicles, vol. ii., p. 539.

as mine own, and not as yours.' 'Well, fair son,' said the king, with a great sigh, 'what right I had to it, God knoweth.' 'Well,' said the prince, 'if you die king, I will have the garland, and trust to keep it with the sword against all mine enemies, as you have done.' Then said the king, 'I commit all to God, and remember you to do well;' with that he turned himself in his bed, and shortly after departed to God.* Perhaps the answer of the young prince, rendered as a poet might have rendered it, would have been preferable to the studied speech which Shakspeare has put into his mouth; he has, however, retained a part of it in the last reply of the Prince of Wales, and the rest of the scene is full of great beauties, as are also those which follow between Gascoigne and the prince. In the whole, Shakspeare seems to have desired to redeem, by beauties of detail, the necessary coldness of the tragic part; it contains many excellences, and its style is generally more careful and more free from whimsicality than that of most of his other historical dramas.

The comic part, which is very important and very considerable in the second part of "Henry IV.," is not, however, equal in merit to the corresponding portion of the first part of the same play. Falstaff has got on in the interval; he has a pension and a rank; his relations with the prince are less frequent; his wit does not, therefore, so frequently serve to deliver him from those embarrassments which rendered him so comic; and comedy is obliged to descend a stage to represent him in his true nature, under the influence of his real tastes, and in the midst of the rascals with whom he associates or the fools whom he makes his dupes. These pictures are undoubtedly painted with striking truth, and abound in comic

* Holinshed's Chronicles, vol. ii., p. 541.

features, but the truth is not always sufficiently removed from disgust for its comicality to find us disposed to enter into all the mirth which it inspires ; and the personages upon whom the ridicule falls do not always appear to us to be worth the trouble of laughing at them. The character of Falstaff is, however, perfectly sustained, and will appear in all its completeness when we next meet with it in another play.

The second part of "Henry IV." appeared, it is believed, in 1598.

KING HENRY V.

(1599.)

It is erroneously that most critics have regarded "Henry V." as one of the weakest of Shakspeare's works. The fifth act, it is true, is empty and cold, and the conversations which compose it possess as little poetic merit as dramatic interest. But the progress of the first four acts is simple, rapid, and animated; the events of the history, plans of government or of conquest, plots, negotiations, and wars, are transformed in them without effort into dramatic scenes full of life and effect. If the characters are not completely developed, they are at least well drawn and well sustained; and the double genius of Shakspeare, as a profound moralist and a brilliant poet, even in the painful and fantastic forms in which he sometimes clothes his thought and imagination, retains, in these four acts, all its abundance and its splendor.

We also meet, in the words of the chorus which fills up the intervals between the acts, with remarkable proofs of Shakspeare's good sense, and of the instinct which led him to feel the inconveniences of his dramatic system. At the very opening of the play, he thus addresses his audience. "Let us," he says,

"On your imaginary forces work;
For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,

Carry them here and there ; jumping o'er times ;
Turning the accomplishment of many years
Into an hour-glass."

And in another place he says,

"Linger your patience on ; and well digest
The abuse of distance, while we force a play."

The popular and comic part of the drama, although the originality of Falstaff's wit is absent, contains scenes of perfect natural gayety ; and the Welshman Fluellen is a model of that serious, ingenious, inexhaustible, unexpected, and jocose military talkativeness, which excites at once our laughter and our sympathy.

KING HENRY VI.

(1589-1591.)

AMONG the editors and commentators of Shakspeare, the three parts of "Henry VI." have formed a subject of controversy which is not yet decided, nor, perhaps, even exhausted. Several of them have thought that the first of these pieces belonged to him in no respect; others, fewer in number, have also denied him the original invention of the last two parts, which, in their opinion, he had merely retouched, and the primitive conception of which belonged to one or two other authors. Neither of these three pieces was printed during Shakspeare's lifetime; but this proves nothing, for the same may be said of several other works, the authenticity of which is contested by no one, although it certainly leaves every latitude to doubt and discussion.

The general weakness of these three compositions, in which we can find only a small number of scenes which reveal the touch of a master's hand, would nevertheless not be a sufficient reason for ascribing them to another pen than his; for, if they belonged to him, they would be his first works, a circumstance that would sufficiently explain their inferiority, at least so far as regards the conduct of the drama, the connection of the scenes, and the art of sustaining and augmenting the interest progressively, by bringing all the various parts of the composition to one

single impression which increases as it advances, just as a river becomes larger at every step from the influx of waters from every side. Such is, in fact, Shakspeare's character in his great compositions, but it is essentially wanting to the three parts of "Henry VI.," and especially to the first part. But Shakspeare's defects are equally absent—that refinement and emphasis from which he has not always escaped even in his finest works, and which are the almost necessary result of the juvenility of ideas which, being astonished, as it were, at themselves, are unable to exhaust the pleasure which they feel in their own production. It would, indeed, be strange if Shakspeare's first essays were exempt from these defects.

We must, however, distinguish here between the three parts of "Henry VI.," those circumstances which concern the first part, to which it is believed that Shakspeare was almost entirely a stranger, and those which have reference to the other two parts, the invention and original composition of which are alone denied to him, although it is admitted that he retouched them to a considerable extent. These are the facts.

In 1623, that is, seven years after the death of Shakspeare, appeared the first complete edition of his works. Fourteen only of his dramas had been printed during his lifetime, and the three parts of "Henry VI." were not among the number; they appeared in 1623, in the state in which they are given at the present day, and were all three ascribed to Shakspeare, although a sort of tradition, as it would appear, already disputed his title to the authorship of the first part. On the other hand, as early as the year 1600, had been published, without the author's name, by Thomas Millington, bookseller, two plays, entitled—one, "The first part of the Contention between the

two famous Houses of York and Lancaster;" and the other, "The true Tragedy of Richard, Duke of York, and Death of Good King Henry VI." Of these two plays, one served as a matrix, if I may be allowed the expression, for the second part of "Henry VI.," and the other for the third. The progress and conformation of the scenes and dialogue are the same in both, with the exception of a few slight differences; entire passages have been transferred verbatim from the original plays into those which Shakspeare has given us under the name of the "Second and Third Parts of Henry VI." Most of the lines have been merely embellished, and a very small number only are entirely new.

In 1619, that is, three years after the death of Shakspeare, these two original dramas were reprinted by a bookseller named Pavier, and this time with the name of our poet. Hence arose among the critics the opinion that they belonged to Shakspeare, and ought to be regarded either as a first composition, which he had himself revised and corrected, or as an imperfect copy, prepared for the actors, and printed in this state—which often happened at this period, as authors were not generally in the habit of having their plays printed. This last opinion was for a long while the most general; but it can not bear investigation, for, as it is observed by Mr. Malone, who of all the commentators has thrown most light upon this question, an awkward copyist omits and maims, but does not add to his original; and the two original plays contain several passages, and also some short scenes, which do not occur in the others. Besides, nothing about them bears the impress of an ill-made copy; the versification is regular, and the style is only much more prosaic than that of the passages which undubitably belong to Shakspeare: from

whence it would result that the copyist had omitted precisely those features which were most striking, and best calculated to impress themselves upon the imagination and the memory.

There only remains, therefore, the supposition of a first sketch, afterward perfected by its author. Among the proofs of detail which Mr. Malone accumulates in opposition to this opinion, and which are not all equally conclusive, there is, however, one which deserves to be taken into consideration, and that is, that the original plays are evidently based upon Hall's chronicle, whereas Shakspeare always followed Holinshed, never borrowing from Hall except when Holinshed has copied him. It is not at all probable that, if he had used Hall for his first works, he would afterward have left the original for the copyist.

If these two opinions be rejected, we must suppose that Shakspeare borrowed without scruple, from the work of another, the substance and stuff which he afterward enriched with his own embroidery. His numerous borrowings from the dramatic authors of this time render this supposition very easy of credence, and the following fact, in this special instance, is almost equivalent to a proof of its legitimacy. In the first place, it must be observed that the two original pieces which were printed in 1600 existed as early as 1593; for we find them, at that period, registered under the same title, and with the name of the same bookseller, in the registers of the Stationers' Company. What cause delayed the publication of these two plays until 1600, it is useless just now to discuss; but the proof of the antiquity of their existence acquires, in the discussion which now occupies our attention, considerable importance from the following passage in a pamphlet by Greene, a very prolific author, who died in the month of

September, 1592. In this pamphlet, which was written a short time before his death, and printed immediately after, as he had ordered in his will, Greene addresses his farewell advice to several of his friends, literary men like himself; and the object of this advice is to dissuade them from working for the theatre, if they desire to escape the griefs of which he complains. One of the motives which he gives for so doing is the imprudence of trusting to the actors; for, he says, "there is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide*,* supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you; and, being an absolute *Johannes Factotum*, is, in his own conceit, the only Shake-scene in the country."† These passages leave no doubt as to Shakspeare's having borrowed from Greene as early as in 1592; and as the three parts of "Henry VI." are the only dramas of our poet which it is believed can be placed before that period, the question would seem to be almost settled; while, at the same time, the quotation by Greene, on this occasion, of a line from the original play, would prove that it was this borrowing which went to his heart. It is, therefore, very probable that Shakspeare, who was then an actor, and exercised the activity of his genius as yet only for the advantage of his troop, may have tried to bring upon the stage, with greater success, dramas already known, and the substance of which furnished him with a few beauties which he could turn to account. As plays then belonged, according to all appearances, to the actors who had bought them, the un-

* In allusion to a line in the old play—"The First Part of the Contention:"

"O, tyger's heart, wrapt in a woman's hide."

† Greene's "Groatworth of Wit," 1592.

dertaking was a natural one, and the success of "Henry VI." may probably have been the first indication, in reliance upon which a genius as yet ignorant of its own strength ventured to dart forward on its career.

In order to explain why Shakspeare, after thus remodeling the two plays from which he constructed the second and third parts of "Henry VI.," did not do the same work for the first part, it will be sufficient to suppose that the first part already enjoyed enough success upon the stage to prevent the interest of the actors from requiring any change in it. This supposition is, moreover, supported by a passage in a pamphlet by Thomas Nashe, in which he says, "How would it have joyed brave Talbot, the terror of the French, to think that after he had lain two hundred years in his tomb, he should triumph again on the stage, and have his bones new embalmed with the tears of ten thousand spectators at least (at several times), who, in the tragedian that represents his person, behold him fresh bleeding."* Nashe, the intimate friend of Greene, would probably not have spoken in such terms of one of Shakspeare's plays, and perhaps the success achieved by this drama may have induced Shakspeare to render the other two parts worthy to share in its triumph; but even with this supposition, it would be difficult not to believe that, either before or afterward, Shakspeare had enhanced, by a few touches, the coloring of a work which had only succeeded in pleasing his contemporaries because Shakspeare had not yet made his appearance. The scenes, therefore, between Talbot and his son must be by him, or else we must believe that before his time there existed in England a dramatic author capable of attaining that touching and no-

* Nashe's "Pierce Penniless; his Supplication to the Devil."

ble truthfulness of which very few, even of his successors, have divined the secret. Nothing can be finer than this description of the two heroes—one dying, and the other scarcely initiated into a warrior's life; the first, satiated with glory, and, in his paternal anxiety, desirous rather to save the life than the honor of his son; the other, stern and inflexible, determined to prove his filial affection by seeking death at his father's side, and by his carefulness thus to maintain the honor of his race. This position, varied by all the alternations of fear and hope which can be occasioned by the chances of a battle, in which the father saves his son, and the son is eventually slain at a distance from his father, contains in itself almost the interest of a drama; and there is every reason to believe that Shakspeare added this ornament to a play which his close connection with those parts of it which he had remodeled had, as it were, incorporated into his works. It must also be observed, that the scenes between Talbot and his son are almost entirely in rhyme, as is the case in many of Shakspeare's works, whereas, in the rest of the play, as well as in the two plays which appear to be intended as a continuation of it, there is scarcely a rhyme to be found. The scene which, in the first part of "Henry VI.," contains most rhyme, is that in which we behold Mortimer dying in prison, and we might therefore suppose that it had received at least some additions from the hand of Shakspeare. These additions, and a few others perhaps, in all not very numerous, may have furnished the editors of 1623 with what appeared to them a sufficient reason for including, among the works of a poet who had excelled all competitors, a play which owed entire its merit to what he had added to it, and which was also necessarily connected with two other works which contained too much of his

composition to be omitted from the number of his productions.

As to the insertion of Shakspeare's name in Pavier's edition of the two original plays, it is easy to explain it as a bookseller's trick—a kind of fraud extremely common at that time, and which has been practised in reference to several dramatic works composed upon subjects which Shakspeare had treated, and which the publishers hoped to sell by favor of his name. This conjecture is rendered all the more probable by the fact that this edition is undated, although we know that it appeared in 1619, which might be a petty bookselling scheme to make purchasers believe that it had appeared during the lifetime of the author whose name it had borrowed.

We are ignorant of the precise period of the performance of the first part of "Henry VI.," which, according to Malone, originally bore the name of "The Historical Play of King Henry the Sixth." The style of this play, except so much of it as we may attribute to Shakspeare, bears the same character as that of all the dramatic works of the period which preceded the compositions of our poet: the grammatical construction is very irregular, the tone is simple but undignified, and the versification sufficiently prosaic. The interest, which is somewhat mediocre—although the play is full of movement—is furthermore greatly diminished, in our view, by the ridiculous and uncouth absurdity of the part of Joan of Arc, which may, however, give us a most exact idea of the spirit in which the English chroniclers have written the history of this heroic maiden, and of the aspect under which they have described her. In this sense the play is historical.

The second part of "Henry VI.," though much more interesting than the first, is not conducted with much

greater art: monologues are continually employed to explain the facts, and feelings are expressed in asides. The scenes, separated by considerable intervals (for the whole play comprehends the space of ten years), are connected with each other by no link; we can perceive none of those efforts which Shakspeare made, in most of his other works, to unite them together, sometimes even at the expense of probability; and as, at the same time, we are never informed of the interval which separates them, we are frequently astonished at finding ourselves transferred, without having remarked it, to a distance of several years from the event which we have just seen accomplished. The different parts of the play, moreover, do not depend essentially upon each other, which is a fault very rare in the works that are indisputably acknowledged to be productions of Shakspeare's pen. Thus, for example, the adventure of Simpcox is absolutely superfluous; that of the armorer and his apprentice is but feebly connected with the subject; and the pirates who put Suffolk to death have nothing whatever to do with the rest of the plot. As to the general cast of the characters, it is far from corresponding to Shakspeare's ordinary talent. It can not, however, be denied, that there is some merit in the portraiture of Henry, a prince whose pious sentiments and constant goodness almost always succeed in interesting us, notwithstanding the ridiculousness of his weakness and poverty of mind, which border closely upon imbecility. The part of Margaret, also, is tolerably well sustained; but her excess of falsity to her husband exceeds the limits of probability; and Shakspeare would not, in his good time at least, have ascribed to two such criminals as Margaret and Suffolk such tender feelings as those which mark their last interview. As for Warwick and Salisbury, they are two char-

acters without any kind of connection, and which it is utterly impossible to explain.

Whether Shakspeare is or is not the author of the play entitled "The First Part of the Contention betwixt the two famous Houses of York and Lancaster," the Second Part of "Henry VI." is entirely based upon that work. Shakspeare has, however, quoted from it verbatim only to a small extent, and particularly in the scenes of rapid dialogue, like that of the adventure of Simpeox, the fight between the two artisans, and the dispute between Gloster and the Cardinal at the hunt; he has made but few alterations in these pieces, as well as in a part of Cade's rebellion. That horribly effective scene, however, in which Lord Say falls into the hands of the populace, is almost entirely by Shakspeare. As for the rather long speeches, he has embellished them all, more or less, and most of them even belong entirely to him, as, for instance, those of Henry on behalf of Gloster, those of Margaret to her husband, a great part of Gloster's defense, some of York's monologues, and nearly the whole of the part of young Clifford. It is not difficult to discern Shakspeare's hand in these, as the poetry is bolder, more brilliant with imagery, and less free, perhaps, from that abuse of wit which Shakspeare does not appear to have borrowed from the dramatic poets of the period. Moreover, with the exception of a certain number of anachronisms common to all Shakspeare's works, this play is tolerably faithful to history; and the perusal of chronicles imparted to the authors of historical dramas, at this period, a character of truthfulness, and means of interest, which superior men alone can derive from subjects of their own invention.

The third part of "Henry VI." comprises the interval from the spring of the year 1455 until the end of 1471,

that is, a space of nearly sixteen years, during which fourteen battles were fought, which, according to a probably much exaggerated calculation, cost more than eighty thousand combatants their lives. Blood and deaths are, therefore, not spared in this drama, although, of these fourteen battles, only four are represented, with which the author has been careful to connect the principal facts of all the fourteen; these facts are, for the most part, assassinations in cold blood, accompanied by the most atrocious circumstances, sometimes borrowed from history, and sometimes added by the author or authors. Thus, the circumstance of the handkerchief steeped in the blood of Rutland, and given to his father, York, to dry his tears, is a pure invention; and the character of Richard, both in this piece and the preceding one, is equally fictitious. Richard was much younger than his brother Rutland, who is here represented as his junior, and he could not possibly have taken any part in the events upon which the two dramas are founded; but his character is, in other respects, well announced and well sustained. That of Margaret does not belie itself; and that of Henry, through the progress of his weakness and imbecility, still affords us casual glimpses of those gentle and pious feelings which made him so interesting in the first part. These portions of his part belong entirely to Shakspeare, as well as most of Henry's meditations during the battle of Towton, his speech to the lieutenant of the Tower, his scene with the keepers, and so forth; and these pieces are either entirely wanting, or merely outlined, in the original play. It is easy to distinguish the passages which were added, for they are characterized by a charm and simplicity of imagery which the style of the original work nowhere presents. Sometimes, also, the passages retouched by Shaks-

peare, whether of his own work or that of another, are remarkable for that refinement of wit which is familiar to him, and which is not compensated, in this case, by that consistency and coherence of imagery which, in his best works, almost always accompany his subtleties. This may be remarked, for example, in Richard's lamentations over the death of his father; it would be difficult to attribute them to any other than Shakspeare, so clearly do they bear his impress; but it would be equally difficult to ascribe them to his better time, and their imperfection might serve as an additional proof that the three parts of "Henry VI.," as we possess them at the present day, present us, not with Shakspeare corrected by himself, but with Shakspeare employing the first efforts of his genius to correct the works of others. He has, besides, embellished this part much less than the preceding one, which probably appeared to him more worthy of his attention; with the exception of Margaret's speech before the battle of Tewkesbury, a part of the scene between Edward and Lady Grey, and a few other unimportant passages, we can add no more to those which have been quoted already as belonging entirely to the corrected work. The greater part of the original play is reproduced word for word; and we also meet with the same want of connection which is noticeable in the first and second parts. The horrors which are accumulated in this part are painted with a certain amount of energy, but it is far removed from that profound truthfulness which, in his finest works, Shakspeare has extracted, as it were, from the very bowels of nature.

KING RICHARD III.

(1597.)

RICHARD III. is one of those men who have produced upon the time in which they lived an impression of horror and dread which is always based upon some real cause, although it may afterward lead to an exaggeration of the realities of the case. Holinshed calls him "one of those bad persons who will not live an hour without doing and exercising cruelty, mischief, and an outrageous manner of living." Undoubtedly—and historical criticism has supplied the proof of this—the life of Richard has been charged with several crimes which do not properly belong to him; but these errors and exaggerations, the natural result of the popular feeling, explain, though they do not justify, the whimsical attempt of Horace Walpole to rehabilitate the memory of Richard, by purging him of most of the crimes of which he is accused. This is one of those paradoxical questions upon which the mind of the critic who allows himself to engage in it becomes excited, and in which the most ingenious discussion serves only to prove to what extent the mind may be employed to embarrass the simple and steady progress of truth. Doubtless we must not judge a person who lived in those times of disorder by the gentle and regular habits of our modern ideas, and many things must be laid to the charge of

the men and facts in the midst of which historical characters appear. But when, at the epoch at which Richard III. lived, after the horrors of the Red and White Roses, the public hatred chose out one man from among all to present him as a model of cruelty and perfidy, there must assuredly have been something extraordinary in his crimes, were it only the distinction which is added to them by superiority of talents and character, which, when it is employed in the service of crime, renders it at once more dangerous and more insulting.

The generally received opinion regarding ~~Richard~~ may have contributed to the success of the play which bears his name; and, perhaps, not one of Shakspeare's works has attained more abiding popularity in England. The critics have not usually treated it so favorably as the public; some of them, and Johnson among the number, have expressed their astonishment at its prodigious success. We might, on the other hand, feel astonished at their surprise, if we did not know, by experience, that the critic, whose duty it is to introduce order into riches which the public has enjoyed at first confusedly, sometimes becomes so attached to this order, and particularly to the manner in which he has conceived it, that he allows himself easily to be induced to condemn those beauties for which he can not find a convenient place within the limits of his system.

"Richard III.," more than any other of Shakspeare's great works, presents the defects common to the historical dramas which, before his time, held possession of the stage; we find in it that accumulation of facts, that aggregation of catastrophes, that improbability of dramatic progress and theatrical execution, which are the necessary results of all that material movement which Shakspeare

has reduced, as much as possible, in those objects which he had more freely at his disposal, but which could not be avoided in national subjects of such recent date, all the details of which were so freshly present to the memory of the spectators. Perhaps we ought, therefore, to admire all the more that genius which could trace out its course through this chaos, and follow up in this labyrinth a thread which is never broken or lost. One idea dominates the whole drama, and that is, the just punishment of the crimes which stained the quarrels of York and Lancaster with blood. At once an example and an organ of the divine wrath, Margaret, by her cries of agony, incessantly invokes vengeance upon those who have committed so many evil deeds, and even upon those who have profited by them; she it is who appears to them when this vengeance has fallen upon them; her name is mingled with the terror of their last moments; and they believe they fall as much beneath her curse as under the blows of Richard—the sacrificial priest of the bloody temple of which Margaret is the sibyl, and who will himself fall, the last victim of the holocaust, carrying with him all the crimes he has avenged, as well as all that he has committed.

That fatality which, in "Macbeth," is revealed in the shape of the witches, and in "Richard III." in the person of Margaret, is nevertheless by no means the same in both dramas. Macbeth, drawn aside from virtue into crime, presents to our imagination a terrible picture of the power of the enemy of man—a power which is, however, subject to the eternal and supreme Master, who prepares its punishment with the same stroke which effects its overthrow. Richard, a much more direct and voluntary agent of the spirit of evil, seems rather to play with him

than to obey him ; and in this terrible sport of the infernal powers, it is, as it were *en passant*, that the justice of Heaven is exercised, until the final moment when it bursts forth without mitigation upon the guilty and insolent wretch who fancied he was braving it, while he was working out its designs.

This difference in the progress of the ideas is carried out in all the details of the character and destiny of the personages. Macbeth, when once fallen, sustains himself only by the intoxicating influence of the blood into which he plunges deeper and deeper ; and he reaches his term, fatigued by a movement so alien to his nature, disabused with regard to the possessions which have cost him so dear, and deriving from the natural elevation of his character alone the force to defend that which he hardly desires any longer to preserve. Richard, as inferior to Macbeth for depth of feeling as he is superior to him in strength of mind, has sought in crime itself the pleasure of exercising his stifled faculties, and of making others feel a superiority which they had ignored or disdained. He deceives, that he may at once succeed and deceive—that he may subject men to himself, and give himself the pleasure of despising them. He laughs both at his dupes and at the means which he has employed to dupe them ; and to the satisfaction which he feels at having conquered them is added that of having acquired a proof of their weakness. His discoveries, however, are not yet sufficient to satisfy the tyranny of his will ; baseness never goes quite so far as he intended, and as he found it necessary to suppose. Compelled afterward to sacrifice the means which he had first corrupted, he is incessantly obliged to seduce new agents in order to ruin new victims. But at length the moment arrives when his means of seduction are no longer suffi-

oient to surmount the difficulties which he has created, and when the bait which he can offer to the passions of men is no longer strong enough to overcome the terror with which he has inspired them regarding their most pressing interests; and then those whom he had divided, in order to make them fall by means of one another, unite against himself. He once felt himself too strong for each of them; he is now alone against them all, and he has ceased to hope for himself; he does himself justice, but without abandoning his own cause, and goes to wreck upon the obstacle which he is indignant at being no longer able to overcome.

The portraiture of such a personage, and of the passions which he can bring into play in order to make them subserve his interests, presents a spectacle which is all the more striking because we clearly see that Richard's hypocrisy acts only upon those whose interest it is to allow themselves to be blinded by it. The people remain mute to the cowardly appeals by which they are invited to unite with the men in power, who are about to give their voice in favor of injustice; or, if a few inferior voices be raised, it is to express a general feeling of alienation and disquietude, and to disclose the existence of a discontented nation, side by side with a servile court. The expectations which result from this state of things, the pathos of several scenes, the sombre energy of Margaret's character, and the restless curiosity connected with projects so threatening in their nature and so animated in their conduct, unite to impart to this work an interest which fully explains the constancy of its success.

The style of "Richard III." is tolerably simple, and, with the exception of one or two dialogues, it is marked by few of those subtleties which sometimes fatigue us even

in Shakspeare's finest dramas. In the part of Richard, one of the wittiest of the tragic portion of the play, the wit is almost entirely exempt from refinement.

This drama comprises a space of fourteen years, from 1471 until 1485. It appears to have been performed in 1597; but before its production several other plays had been written on the same subject.

KING HENRY VIII.

(1601.)

ALTHOUGH Johnson places "Henry VIII." in the second rank of Shakspeare's historical dramas, with "Richard III.," "Richard II.," and "King John," this work is far from approaching in merit the least of those with which the critic compares it. A desire to please Queen Elizabeth, or perhaps a command from that princess that he should compose a drama of which her birth should in some sort constitute the subject, could not supply the place of that liberty which is the soul of genius. The attempt to introduce Henry VIII. upon the stage in presence of his daughter, and of a daughter whose mother he had put to death, presented a complication of difficulties which the poet did not endeavor to surmount. The character of Henry is completely insignificant; but it is somewhat extraordinary to notice the interest with which the poet of Elizabeth has invested Catharine of Aragon. In the part of Wolsey, especially at the moment of his downfall, we may discern the touch of the great master; but it appears that, in the opinion of the English, the great merit of the work consists in its pomps and splendor, which have led to its being frequently reproduced upon the stage on occasions of great solemnity. "Henry VIII." has for us a literary interest, on account of its style, which the poet

has certainly been careful to bring into conformity with the language of the court, as spoken in his own time, or a few years previously. In no other of his works is the style so elliptical; the habits of conversation seem to introduce into the construction of its sentences that economy and abbreviation which, in English pronunciation, deprive words of nearly half their syllables. Moreover, we find in it scarcely any play upon words, and, excepting only in a few passages, very little poetry.

"Henry VIII." was performed, it is believed, in 1601, at the end of the reign of Elizabeth, and revived, as it would appear, after her death, in 1613. There is reason to believe that the panegyric on James I., which is inserted at the end of the prediction concerning Elizabeth, was added at this period, either by Shakspeare himself, or by Ben Jonson, to whom the prologue and epilogue are pretty generally attributed. It was, it is believed, at this revival, in 1613, that the cannon discharged on the arrival of the king at Wolsey's palace set fire to the Globe Theatre, which was burned to the ground.

The play comprises a period of twelve years, from 1521 until 1533. Before the composition of Shakspeare's drama, we are not aware of the existence of any play on the same subject.

One common character is manifested in all Shakspeare's historical dramas, and that is, the profoundly national and popular feeling which animates the poet. Upon the events and personages which he represents, he thinks and feels like his audience, like the simplest and most ignorant of his audience; he cares neither for truth nor for justice; he has not the slightest pretension to redress errors or to

reprehend public passions ; he abandons himself without reserve to these feelings, for he shares in them, and reckons upon them for his success. The profound and sensible moralist, the man who possesses so accurate a knowledge of the human heart, the truthful delineator of the most varied characters, is at the same time the blindest and most passionate of English patriots. He has penetrated, by turns, with admirable intelligence and independence, into the souls of Hamlet, of Romeo, of Macbeth, and of Othello ; but as soon as he approaches the history of his own country in relation to that of other lands, all independence and impartiality of mind abandon him ; in all things and regarding all persons, he thinks and judges absolutely like John Bull.

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE.

(1598.)

THE substance of the adventure which constitutes the subject of "The Merchant of Venice" will be found in the chronicles or literature of almost every country, sometimes entire, and sometimes unaccompanied by the very piquant episode of the loves of Bassanio and Portia. A judgment similar to that of Portia has been attributed to Pope Sixtus V., who, with greater severity, condemned, it is said, both the contractors of the engagement to a heavy fine, as a punishment for the immorality of their contract. On this occasion, the subject of dispute was a bet, and the Jew was the loser. A collection of French novels, entitled "*Roger Bontemps en belle Humeur*," relates the same story, but it is to the advantage of the Christian, and Sultan Saladin is the judge. In a Persian manuscript which narrates the same adventure, a rich Jew makes this bargain with a poor Syrian Mussulman, in order to obtain the means of ruining him, and thereby succeeding in gaining possession of his wife, with whom he is violently in love: this case is decided by a Cadi of Emesa. But the whole story is related, with a few slight differences, in a very old work written in Latin, and entitled "*Gesta Romanorum*;" as well as in the "*Pecorone*" of Ser Giovanni, a collection of novels composed before the

end of the fourteenth century, and therefore long anterior to Sixtus V., which renders the anecdote told about this Pope by Gregorio Leti extremely improbable.

In the novel of *Ser Giovanni*, the lady of Belmont is not a young girl forced to subject her choice to the condition prescribed by the singular will of her father, but a young widow who, of her own accord, imposes a much more singular condition upon those whom chance or choice may bring into her port. Compelled to share the bed of the lady, if they can succeed in profiting by the advantages afforded them by such a position, they will obtain possession of the widow's person and property. But if they fail, they lose their vessel and its cargo, and are sent off at once with a horse and a sufficient sum of money to defray their expenses homeward. Undeterred by this test, many tried the adventure, but all failed; for no sooner had they entered the bed than they fell into a sound sleep, from which they only awoke on the following morning to learn that the lady had already unloaded the ship, and prepared the horse which was intended to convey the unlucky aspirant home again. No one attempted to renew so costly an enterprise, the ill success of which discouraged even the boldest of adventurers. Gianetto alone (such is the name of the young Venetian in the novel) persevered, and after two failures determined to risk a third adventure. His godfather Ansaldo, notwithstanding the loss of the first two vessels, of which he had received no account, equips for him a third, with which Gianetto promises amply to repair their losses. But, exhausted by his previous undertakings, Ansaldo is obliged, for the third venture, to borrow the sum of ten thousand ducats from a Jew, on the same conditions as those which Shylock imposes upon Antonio. Gianetto arrives at Belmont, and, being warned by a serv-

ant not to drink the wine which will be offered him before going to bed, at last surprises the lady, who, though at first greatly disconcerted at finding him awake, nevertheless resigns herself to her fate, and thinks herself happy to proclaim him her husband on the following day. Giano, intoxicated with his happiness, forgets poor Ansaldo until the fatal day when the bond becomes due. He then recollects the circumstance by chance, hastens to Venice, and the rest of the story occurs as Shakspeare has related it.

It is easy to perceive the reason and necessity of the various changes which he has introduced into this adventure. It was not, however, so impossible of representation upon the stage, in his time, as not to authorize us to suppose that he was induced to make these changes by a desire to impart greater morality to his personages, and greater interest to the action. Thus the position of the generous Antonio, and the delineation of his character, at once so devoted, courageous, and melancholy, are not the only source of the charm which reigns so powerfully throughout the work. The gaps which this position leaves are, at all events, so happily filled up that we can perceive no void, so pleasantly is the soul occupied with the feelings which naturally arise from it. It seems as though Shakspeare were desirous here to describe the first delightful days of a happy marriage beneath their different points of view. The speech of Portia to Bassanio, at the moment when fate has just decided in his favor, and when she already regards herself as his happy spouse, is full of such pure abandonment, and of conjugal submission at once so touching and so noble, that her character derives from it an inexpressible charm; and Bassanio, assuming from that instant the superior rank which befits him, no longer has

to fear that he will be degraded by the spirit and courage of his wife, although the part which she takes the moment afterward is so decided. We know that now the moment of necessity is past, every thing falls into its proper order, and that the high qualities which she will subject to her duty as a wife will only add to the happiness of her husband.

In a subordinate class, Lorenzo and Jessica afford a pleasing exhibition of the tender jocoseness of two young married people, who are so filled with their happiness that they diffuse it over objects most foreign to themselves, and enjoy the most indifferent thoughts and actions as if they were so many portions of an existence entirely pervaded by happiness. The conversation between Lorenzo and Jessica, the garden, the moonlight, the music which welcomes the return of Portia and Bassanio, and the arrival of Antonio, dispose the soul to all the sweet impressions which will be occasioned by the image of complete felicity, in the union of Portia and Bassanio in the midst of all the friends who are about to enjoy their cares and benefactions. Shakspeare is almost the only dramatic poet who has not feared to dwell upon the picture of happiness; but he felt he had the means of filling it.

The invention of the three coffers, the original of which also occurs in many places, is to be found, in almost the same shape as that which Shakspeare has used, in another adventure of the "*Gesta Romanorum*," excepting only that the person subjected to the trial is the daughter of a king of Apulia, who, from the wisdom of her choice, is deemed worthy to espouse the son of the Emperor of Rome. It will be seen from that circumstance that these "*Gesta Romanorum*" do not precisely extend so far back as the ages of historical antiquity.

The character of the Jew, Shylock, is justly celebrated in England.

This drama was performed before the year 1598 ; but we possess no certain information regarding its date. Several plays on the same subject had previously been brought on the stage ; and it had also formed the substance of a number of ballads.

In 1701, Mr. Granville, afterward Marquis of Lansdowne, restored "The Merchant of Venice" to the stage, with numerous alterations, under the title of "The Jew of Venice." It was performed for a long time under this new form.

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR.

(1601.)

ACCORDING to a generally received tradition, the comedy of "The Merry Wives of Windsor" was composed by order of Queen Elizabeth, who, having been greatly delighted with Falstaff, desired to see him once again on the stage. Shakspeare had promised that Falstaff should die in "Henry V.,"* but doubtless, after having introduced him once again, feeling embarrassed by the difficulty of establishing new relations between Falstaff and Henry when the latter had become king, he satisfied himself with announcing, at the opening of the piece, the sickness and death of Falstaff, without presenting him afresh to the eyes of the public. Elizabeth was of opinion that this was a breach of faith, and required a new description of the life of the fat knight. It therefore appears that "The Merry Wives of Windsor" was composed after "Henry V.," although in historical order it ought to take precedence. Some commentators have even held, in opposition to Johnson's opinion, that this drama should be placed between the two parts of "Henry IV.;" but there appears to be in favor of Johnson's opinion, which places it between "Henry IV." and "Henry V.," one conclusive reason, and that is, that according to the other supposition, the

* See the Epilogue of the Second Part of "Henry IV."

unity, if not of character, at least of impression and effect, would be entirely destroyed.

The two parts of "Henry IV." were composed at a single effort, or, at least, without wandering from the same train of ideas; not only is the Falstaff of the Second Part precisely the same man as the Falstaff of the First Part, but he is presented under the same aspect; and if, in this Second Part, Falstaff is not quite so amusing, because he has made his fortune, and because his wit is no longer employed in incessantly extricating him from the ridiculous embarrassments into which he is thrown by the assertion of pretensions so utterly at variance with his tastes and habits, he is, nevertheless, brought upon the stage with the same class of tastes and habits. He brings his influence with Henry to bear upon Justice Shallow, just as he used to boast, among his confidants, of the freedom with which he treated the prince; and the public affront which serves as his punishment at the end of the Second Part of "Henry IV." is only the consequence and complement of the private affronts which Henry V., when Prince of Wales, had amused himself by putting upon him during the course of the two plays. In a word, the action which is begun between Falstaff and the prince, in the First Part, is followed up without interruption in the Second Part, and then terminated as it necessarily was destined to finish, and as he had announced that it would finish.

"The Merry Wives of Windsor" presents a different action, and exhibits Falstaff in another position, and under another point of view. He is, indeed, the same man; it would be impossible to mistake him; but he has grown older, and plunged deeper into his material tastes, and is solely occupied in satisfying the wants of his gluttony. Doll Tear-Sheet, at least, still abused his imagination, for

with her he thought himself a libertine ; but here he has no such thought ; he is anxious to make the insolence of his gallantries serve to supply him with money ; and his vanity still deceives him with regard to the means of obtaining this money. Elizabeth, it is said, had desired Shakspeare to describe Falstaff in love ; but Shakspeare, who was better acquainted with the personages of his own conception, felt that this kind of ridiculousness was not suited to such a character, and that it was necessary to punish Falstaff in a more sensitive point. Even his vanity would not be sufficient for this purpose ; for Falstaff could derive advantage from every disgrace in which he was involved ; and he had now reached such a point as no longer even to seek to dissemble his shame. The liveliness with which he describes to Mr. Brook his sufferings in the basket of dirty linen is no longer the vivacity of Falstaff relating his exploits against the robbers of Gadshill, and afterward getting out of the scrape so pleasantly when his falsehood is brought home to him. The necessity for boasting of himself is no longer one of his chief necessities ; he wants money, money above all things, and he will be suitably chastised only by inconveniences as real as the advantages which he promises himself. Thus the buck-basket and the blows of Mr. Ford are perfectly adapted to the kind of pretensions which draw upon Falstaff such a correction ; but although such an adventure may, without any difficulty, be adapted to the Falstaff of "Henry IV.," it applies to him in another part of his life and character ; and if it were introduced between the two parts of the action which is continued in the two parts of "Henry IV.," it would chill the imagination of the spectator to such a degree as entirely to destroy the effect of the second part.

Although this reason may appear sufficient, we might adduce many others in justification of Johnson's opinion. They must not, however, be sought for in chronology. It would be an impracticable work to endeavor to harmonize the different chronological data which Shakspeare is pleased to establish, often in the same piece; and it is as impossible to find, chronologically, the place of "The Merry Wives of Windsor" between "Henry IV." and "Henry V.," as between the two parts of "Henry IV." But, adopting this last supposition, the interview between Shallow and Falstaff in the Second Part of "Henry IV.," the pleasure which Shallow feels at seeing Falstaff again, after so long a separation, and the respect which he professes for him, and which he carries so far as to lend him a thousand pounds, become shocking improbabilities; for, after the comedy of "The Merry Wives of Windsor," Shallow can not be caught by Falstaff. Nym, whom we find in "Henry V." is not numbered among Shakspeare's followers in the Second Part of "Henry IV." With either supposition, it would be somewhat difficult to account for the personage Quickly, if we did not suppose that it referred to another Quickly—a name which Shakspeare found it convenient to render common to all procuresses. The Quickly of "Henry IV." is married, and her name is therefore not that of a girl; but the Quickly of "The Merry Wives of Windsor" is not married.

After all, it would be superfluous to seek to establish in a very accurate manner the historical order of these three dramas; Shakspeare himself did not bestow a thought upon the matter. We may, however, believe that, from the uncertainty in which he has left the whole affair, he was at least desirous that it should not be altogether impossible to make "The Merry Wives of Windsor" the con-

tinuation of "Henry IV." Hurried, as it would appear, by the orders of Elizabeth, he at first produced only a kind of sketch of this comedy, which was nevertheless acted for a considerable period, as we find it printed in the first editions of his works; and it was not until several years afterward that he arranged it in the form in which we now possess it. In this early play, Falstaff, at the moment when he is in the forest, alarmed by the noises which he hears on every side, inquires if it is not "the mad Prince of Wales stealing his father's deer." This supposition is suppressed in the revised copy of the comedy, in which the poet apparently wished to endeavor to indicate a rather more probable order of facts. In the piece as we now possess it, Page reproaches Fenton with "having been of the company" of the Prince of Wales and of Poins. At all events, he no longer belongs to it; and we may suppose that the name of "wild prince" was still retained to show what the Prince of Wales had been, and what Henry V. no longer was. However this may be, although "The Merry Wives of Windsor" may present a less exalted kind of comicality than the First Part of "Henry IV.," it is, nevertheless, one of the most diverting productions of that gayety of mind which Shakspeare has displayed in several of his comedies.

A number of novels may contest the honor of having furnished Shakspeare with the substance of the adventure upon which he has based the plot of the "Merry Wives of Windsor." It was probably from the same sources that Molière borrowed the idea of his "Ecole des Femmes." Shakspeare's own invention consists in having made the same intrigue serve to punish both the jealous husband and the insolent lover. He has thus imparted to the drama, with the exception of the license of a few expres-

sions, a much more moral tone than that of the novels from which he may have derived his subject, and in which the husband always ends by being duped, while the lover is made happy.

This comedy appears to have been composed in 1601.

THE TEMPEST.

(1611.)

"WHETHER this be or be not, I'll not swear," says old Gonzalo, at the conclusion of the "Tempest," when utterly confounded by the marvels which have surrounded him ever since his arrival on the island. It seems as though, through the mouth of the honest man of the drama, Shakspeare desired to express the general effect of this charming and singular work. As brilliant, light, and transparent as the aerial beings with which it is filled, it scarcely allows itself to be apprehended by reflection; and hardly, through its changeful and diaphanous features, can we feel certain that we perceive a subject, a dramatic contexture, and real adventures, feelings, and personages. Nevertheless, it contains all these, and all these are revealed in it; and, in rapid succession, each object in its turn moves the imagination, occupies the attention, and disappears, leaving no trace behind but a confused emotion of pleasure and an impression of truth, to which we dare not either refuse or grant our belief.

"This drama," says Warburton, "is one of the noblest efforts of that sublime and amazing imagination, peculiar to Shakspeare, which soars above the bounds of nature, without forsaking sense; or, more properly, carries nature along with him beyond her established limits." Every

thing is, in this picture, at once fantastic and true. As if he were the creator of the work, as if he were the true enchanter, surrounded by all the illusions of his art, Prospero, manifesting himself to us, seems the only opaque and solid body in the midst of a populace of airy phantoms clothed with the forms of life, but unpossessed of the appearances of duration. A few minutes scarcely elapse before the amiable Ariel, lighter even than when he comes with the quickness of thought, escapes from the contact of the magic wand, and, freed from the forms which are prescribed to him—free, in fact, from all sensible form, dissolves into thin air, in which his individual existence, as far as we are concerned, vanishes away. Is not that half-intelligence, which seems to glimmer in the monster Caliban, an effect of magic? and does it not seem that, on setting foot out of the disenchanted isle in which he is about to be left to himself, we shall see him relapse into his natural state of an inert mass, assimilating itself by degrees to the earth, from which it is scarcely distinct? When far from our view, what will become of that Antonio and that Sebastian, who were so ready to conceive plans of crime, and of that Alonzo, who was so easily and frivolously accessible to feelings of every kind? What will become of the young lovers, so quickly and so completely enamored of each other, and who, in our view, seem to have been created only that they might love, and to have no other object in life than to disclose to our view the delightful pictures of love and innocence? Each of these personages displays to us only that portion of his existence which concerns his present position; none of them reveals to us in himself those abysses of nature, or those deep sources of thought into which Shakspeare descends so frequently and so thoroughly; but they manifest before our

eyes all the outward effects of these inward feelings ; we do not know whence they come, but we recognize perfectly well what they seem to be—true visions of which we can discern neither the flesh nor the bones, but the forms of which are distinct and familiar to us.

Thus, by the suppleness and lightness of their nature, these singular creatures conduce to a rapidity of action and a variety of movement, unexampled, perhaps, in any other of Shakspeare's dramas. None of his other plays are more amusing or more animated than this, and in none is a lively, and even waggish, gayety more naturally conjoined with serious interests, melancholy feelings, and touching affections. It is a fairy tale in all the force of the term, and in all the vivacity of the impressions which such a tale can impart.

The style of the "Tempest" shares in this kind of magic. Figurative and aerial, bringing before the mind a host of images and impressions as vague and fugitive as those uncertain forms which are depicted in the clouds, it moves the imagination without riveting it, and maintains it in a state of undecided excitement, which renders it accessible to all the spells under which the enchanter desires to place it. It is a tradition in England, that the celebrated Lord Falkland,* Mr. Selden, and Lord Chief-justice Vaughan, regarded the style of the part of Caliban, in the

* The most virtuous, amiable, and erudite man in England, during the reign of Charles I., of whom Lord Clarendon has said that "if there were no other brand upon the Civil War than his single loss, it must be most infamous and execrable to all posterity." After having boldly maintained the liberties of his country against Charles I. in Parliament, he joined the cause of that prince as soon as it became the cause of justice ; and having been made a minister of Charles, he died at the battle of Newbury, in despair at the misfortunes which he foresaw ; he was then thirty-three years of age.

"Tempest," as quite peculiar to that personage, and as one of Shakspeare's own creations. Johnson is of a contrary opinion; but, supposing the tradition to be authentic, the authority of Johnson would not be sufficient to invalidate that of Lord Falkland, a man of eminently elegant mind, and who was remarkable, as it would appear, for a delicacy of tact, which, in criticism at least, was often wanting in the Doctor. Besides, Lord Falkland, who was almost a contemporary of Shakspeare, as he was born several years before the death of the poet, would be entitled to be believed in preference regarding shades of language which, a hundred and fifty years later, were naturally merged by Johnson under a general color of oldness. If, therefore, we had any right to decide between them, we should be rather disposed to adhere to the opinion of Lord Falkland, and even to apply to the whole work what he has said regarding the part of Caliban alone. At all events, we may remark, that the style of the "Tempest" appears, more than any other of Shakspeare's works, to differ from that general type of expression of thought which is found and maintained more or less every where, in spite of the difference of idioms. We must probably ascribe this fact partly to the singularity of the position, and to the necessity for bringing into harmony so many different conditions, feelings, and interests, which, for a few hours, are involved in a common fate, and surrounded by the same supernatural atmosphere. In none of his other works, moreover, has Shakspeare been so sparing of plays upon words.

It would be somewhat difficult to determine with precision to what species of the marvelous that which Shakspeare has employed in the "Tempest" belongs. Ariel is a true sylph; but the sprites which Prospero subjects to him, fairies, imps, and goblins, belong to the popular su-

perstitutions of the North. Caliban is akin at once to the gnome and the demon; his brute existence is animated only by an infernal malice; and the "Oho! Oho!" with which he answers Prospero, when he charges him with having attempted to dishonor his daughter, was the exclamation, and probably the kind of chuckle, ascribed, in England, to the Devil, in the old Mysteries in which he played a part. Setebos, whom the monster invokes as the god, and perhaps as the husband, of his mother, was held to be the devil or god of the Patagonians, who represented him, it was said, with horns growing out of his head. We can not exactly picture to ourselves the manner in which this Caliban must have been formed, so as to account for his being so frequently taken for a fish; it appears that he was represented with his arms and legs covered with scales; but it seems to me that a fish's head, or something like it, would be necessary to impart any probability to the mistakes of which he is the object. But Shakspeare may very probably not have looked so closely into the matter, and may have troubled himself but little to obtain an exact idea of the form suited to his monster. He played with his subject, and allowed it to flow from his brilliant imagination clothed with all the poetic tints which it received while passing through his brain. The lightness of his labor is sufficiently observable from the various inadvertences which have escaped from him; as, for example, when he makes Ferdinand say that the Duke of Milan "and his brave son" have perished in the storm, although nothing whatever is said about this son in the remainder of the drama, and there is nothing to lead us to suppose that he is in existence upon the island, although Ariel, who assures Prospero that no one has perished, has only confined the crew under the hatches.

The "Tempest" is a drama tolerably regular as regards the unities, since the storm which swamps the vessel in the first scene occurs within view of the island, and the entire action does not embrace an interval of more than three hours. Some commentators have thought that Shakspeare might have intended to reply, by this specimen of what he was able to do, to Ben Jonson's continual criticisms upon the irregularity of his works. Dr. Johnson is of an opposite opinion, and regards this circumstance as an effect of chance and the natural result of the subject; but there is one thing that might give us reason to believe that Shakspeare, at least, intended to avail himself of this advantage, and that is, the care with which the different personages, even including the boatswain, who has slept during the whole of the action, mark the time which has elapsed since the beginning of the play. More than this; when Ariel informs Prospero that they are drawing near the sixth hour, the hour in which his master had promised him that their labors should cease, Prospero replies :

"I did say so, when first I raised the tempest."

This remark would even seem to indicate an intention which the poet desired should be perceived.

It is not known from what sources Shakspeare derived the subject of the "Tempest;" but it appears sufficiently certain that he borrowed it from some Italian novel, which it has hitherto been impossible to discover.

Malone's chronology places the composition of the "Tempest" in the year 1612, which conjecture, however, agrees ill with another supposition equally probable. While reading the Masque performed before Ferdinand and Miranda, it is impossible not to be struck with the idea that the "Tempest" was first composed to be performed on the oc-